PITTA

Bulletin of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh

No. 93 : January 1999

NOTES & NEWS

Field Trip to **Uma Maheshwaram**, 22 November, 1998

Aasheesh Pittie

It is a 150km long drive to Uma Maheshwaram and a midway halt for breakfast at Amangal is inevitable. Hot idlies off a roadside pushcart, piping cuppas at the omnipresent Udupi hotel, fresh plucked fruit from overflowing baskets of vendors! One vehicle actually stopped way back at a stall for sizzling hot *poories* and potato *sabzi*! Birding day delights can be gastronomic too! Fortified and warmed, we piled in for the first stop—Dindi Project.

A dam is constructed across Dindi, a tributary of the Krishna. In years past this water-body has hosted 2,000+ flocks of Greater Flamingo *Phoenicopterus ruber*. This year's abundant rain topped up the reservoir, spreading a glistening sheet of water far and wide. From the dam we cannot spot anything exciting. A few gulls *Larus* sp., float in the distance on its still surface. A pair of nimble River Terns *Sterna aurantia* twist and dive repeatedly—in a shower of sparkling droplets. An adult Brahminy Kite *Haliastur indus* glides desultorily overhead. Its silhouette, confusing some. As if to reassure them it dips a wingtip and slips across the sky where the sunlight bounces off its clean white breast and chestnut plumage. On the distant shore, a few trees shine with large glistening white fruit. Egrets! Past the causeway, near the Fisheries department, we spot our guide, a forest guard. A giant *pipal*, *Ficus religiosa* Linnaeus, on that property, is home to a large colony of Indian Flying Foxes *Pteropus giganteus*. A cloaked judiciary—ruminating jurisprudence—in an upside-down world.

Uma Maheshwaram is a Sacred Grove, around an old temple of Lord Shiva. The shrine is constructed on a thin ledge running along the side of a hill that rears 200m from the surrounding plains (*c.* 500m above MSL) to form the Amrabad Plateau, a part of Nagarjunasagar-Srisailam Wildlife Sanctuary. At this particular spot, the plateau forms a 'C' shaped amphitheatre with stunning scenic impact when viewed from the plain. These hills are formed of lateritic soils and support dry-deciduous forests. Uma Maheshwaram is clothed in a unique moist-deciduous flora, as perennial streams, that leach the sheer rock above the temple, feed it. During monsoon these rills transform into a curtain of waterfalls that generate enough humidity and moisture to sustain bryophytic flora amidst musical liquid splashing. Moss carpets moist unused surfaces in green velvet. Radiating sprays of ferns abound in cracks and crevices, rooted to and sustained by negligible quantities of soil. Various shrubs and trees cling precariously to the rock wall, spreading a web of roots on its surface, indicating soils of extremely poor nutritive value. But sustained there, by the damp that percolates and oozes from rock! *Ficus* sp. let down thin aerial roots in their search for *terra firma*, from the rock wall rising above us. Camel's Foot Climber *Bauhinia vahlii* W. & A., that giant lianous creeper, smothers tree crowns in its fecund abandon. Its leaves are large enough to be used as plates by local inhabitants. When it flowers in February-March, what a glorious sight it will be! Vinay Totawar ponders aloud, how long this stony shoulder will survive the ravages of natural and human-induced erosion! This is the tor

above the temple. Below, land angles to the plains, thick with vegetation, in leaf-heavy canopy. A recent study of the biodiversity of sacred groves in Andhra Pradesh [Anon. (1996): Sacred and Protected Groves of Andhra Pradesh. WWF-India A.P. State Office. Hyderabad viii + 96pp], revealed that Uma Maheshwaram "has the richest flora in Mahbubnagar District. About 400 plants were recorded during floristic studies of which about 150 are perennial. Bryophytes like *Riccella, Notothallus, Moss, Marchantia* and Pteridophytes like *Salaginella* spp., *Pteridium* spp., *Adiantum incisum, Actiniopteris, Petris, etc.*, were observed...It is an important grove requiring better protection."

Half past eleven is not a very good time for birding. But we have no choice. We reach at that hour and have to make the most of it! While most drive straight up to the temple, a few of us park at the foothill and walk up the winding 1.4km long road. White-browed bulbuls' *Pycnonotus luteolus* electric-spark warbles follow our footsteps. They always try to say more than time permits! Jungle Babblers *Turdoides striatus* abuse and curse in guttural monosyllables, from the undergrowth. A hidden woodpecker's drumming echoes in short staccato bursts, ridiculing our 'bird-spotting' prowess. A Large Green Barbet's *Megalaima zeylanica* distant "*kutroo-kutroo-kutroo*" augurs a fruitful day ahead.

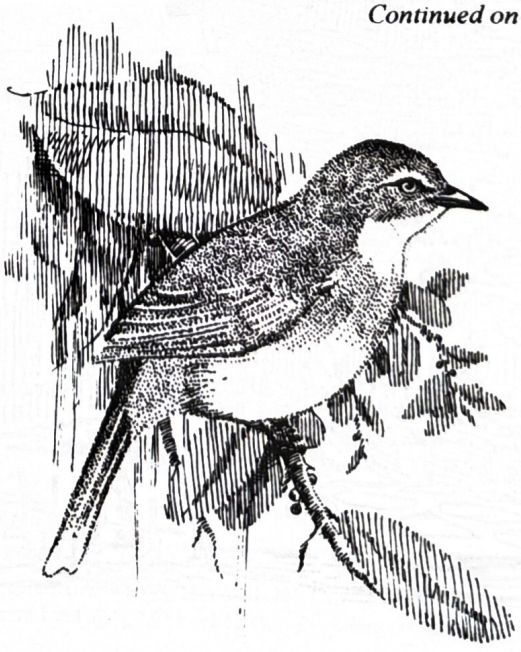
As we reach the top (I have walked up with some members), a few bird-watchers are waiting near the car park, while some have gone ahead, led by the effervescent 'Kullu'—M.S. Kulkarni. Bonnet macaques *Macaca radiata* (Geoffroy) throng the place. Two to three troops range along the shelf, bullying pilgrims and visitors either collectively, to jettison their eatables, or stealthily stalking someone carrying food, biding time to dash in boldly and snatch away the savoury at an unguarded moment. Sachin Jaltare falls prey to one wily individual who grabs a loaf of bread from between his legs, as he sits cross-legged and sketches! Many females have young clinging to their bellies. The ferns are a source of wonder for some. The vista of the valley, as it stretches away into the distance, to others. Shafaat Ulla, relatively new to birdwatching, describes what must be a Whitethroated Ground Thrush *Zoothera citrina cyanotus*, above us on a rocky ledge. While we crane our necks upwards, someone espies a bird of prey, wings swept back, in a shallow glide, heading over the cliff above us. "Bonelli's Eagle *Hieraaetus fasciatus*", says Rajeev. In quick succession we spot a buzzard, but are not able to identify the species and 2 Crested Hawk-Eagles *Spizaetus cirrhatus*. All use the warm air rising from the valley—to conserve energy. Song of Tickell's Blue Flycatcher *Cyornis tickelliae* rises from the foliage below us. Not many are familiar with it. Their auditory faculties have yet to be fine-tuned to Nature's sounds.

Kulkarni's group is bunched up ahead, kinked heads peering up the rock face. Kullu's glee is contagious. "There are YTBs here!" he exclaims. The excitement of viewing an endemic rarity, an avian star, grips everyone. The bird-watchers are charged with expectation. Yellowthroated Bulbul *Pycnonotus xantholaemus* (YTB), Blueheaded Rock Thrush *Monticola cinchlorynchus* and Verditer Flycatcher *Eumyias thalassina* are seen in quick succession. Questions, explanations, discussions, disagreements. Field-guides are opened, notepads scribbled in, descriptions spoken, and vehement denials expressed. Grey Drongo *Dicrurus leucophaeus*, and its smaller, smarter cousin, Whitebellied Drongo *D. caerulescens*, unconcerned witnesses of this gesticulating group, sally from perches after aerial prey in thrilling dives and swoops vying with Small Green Bee-eaters *Merops orientalis* for these midges. The YTBs—tellurian relics of prehistoric landforms, adroit survivors of a demanding landscape—are in small groups of 2-3 or more, generally feeding on small berries or chasing one another through the foliage of trees that cling like limpets to the vertical rock face. Inexplicably, much to the embarrassed chagrin of yours truly, two plumage-types occur among these birds! One, as described in the books, the other with yellow chin and throat, a white chest and belly, yellow thighs, vent and under tail coverts, *below*. *Above*, it has a yellow crown and head, olive back and olive-brown wings and tail which is tipped yellow. The yellow head and clean white belly are bewildering. Dr S. Subramanya, who has done some work on the species, informs us that Dr Eric Lott reported similar looking birds from the lower Palnis! This raises several questions that require answers from the experts. It is a thrilling experience to watch them gambol with such abandon in front of us! Their bubbling calls almost like their commoner cousins of the plains, Whitebrowed Bulbuls, but slightly different. Less garbled, at a higher pitch.

We watch House Swifts *Apus affinis* balling in the sky in loudly chittering flocks and spot Dusky Crag Martins *Hirundo concolor* among them. Sachin settles to sketch, while others engage in light banter amidst rumbling bellies! Blue Rock Pigeons *Columba livia* clap wings as they take off from craggy perches. I collect glittering shards of stolen moments when sounds of civilization cease and those of nature spring forth. A multitude of liquid splashing. The snapping of a bee-eater's mandibles. A Grey Junglfowl's *Gallus sonneratii* proclamation of territory. The lisped "*tiss-yip*" of the impatient, zesty Green Leaf Warbler *Phylloscopus trochiloides* as it searches along leafy stalks for tidbits. Aural delights of bird-watching!

Sachin has either finished his play with lines or gastronomic requirements take precedence in his scheme of things. We picnic with relish and bonhomie—undisturbed, surprisingly, by the *bandar-log*! For the post-lunch session, our group splits into two. One prefers to bird-watch as they walk down the hill on the rough-hewn stairway. The other re-traces the earlier route. Dividends for the latter are almost immediate. Besides the morning's goodies, a long, clear view of a large Green Barbet. K.C. Ramakrishna and I walk ahead, trailing some YTBs. I peer over the railing and transfix an Emerald Dove *Chalcophaps indica* into immobility. It is perched twelve feet away on a tree! After the initial hesitation, it rockets away along the hill, giving views to the others too! When we have all gathered at the bottom of the hill and begin comparing notes, those that descended on foot will not be cowered by the dove. They have seen a Yellowcheeked Tit *Parus xanthogenys*! 46 species have been sighted today. The collective opinion of participants is to stay overnight at Achampet, in the future, and bird watch here during decent *birding* hours.

Continued on page 5.



LETTER FROM AN INSECT-HUNTING ORNITHOLOGIST—21

"The central plateau of South, or Deccan, India rises to an elevation of from 1,000 to 3,000 feet. It is spacious, remote, and at times quite weird. In the higher mountains dwell many of India's mystery people—the pre-Dravidian tribes. Their very names suggest primevality, viz. Santhals, Gonds, Khassias, etc. They are strange, shy people, to whom the tribal law is sacred. They have no caste, only the government of the tribe. Their dwellings are crude structures made of bamboo and wattle snuggling into the hills. Without his hills, indeed, the aborigine is a poor, lost creature. He hunts and fishes for his food, and cannot understand the degeneracy of those who cultivate fat lands or live in great cities. He lives so close to nature that nature is his god. For him Hinduism is a wearying maze of ununderstandability. He reveres the simple forces of nature and believes that a waterfall that can eat away a limestone rock or displace a chunk of ancient sandstone is more immediately worshipful than the abstract creative force of Brahma.....the weakness of men for abstracting nature and etherealising God has his completest contempt." [W.J. Grant, 1938, The Spirit of India, pp. 29-30]

"The Peninsula is structurally, stratigraphically, and physiographically, quite a contrast to the above two divisions ['extra-peninsular region' and 'Indo-Gangetic foreland'—KG] of India. It represents a stable block of the earth's crust which has remained unaffected by orogenic or mountain-building movements since practically the close of the Precambrian era [over 600 million years ago—KG]. The later changes which have taken place are mainly epeirogenic or plateau-building movements by which some parts have risen or sunk in relation to others. The Peninsula is a shield area composed of some of the oldest rocks of the earth's crust which have undergone much crushing and metamorphism. On this basement of crystalline rocks lie some later sediments and extensive lava flows (Deccan Traps) [some 70 million years ago—KG]." [C.S. Pichamuthu, 1967, Physical Geography of India, p. 179]

My personal objective in writing these Letters for *Pitta* has been to educate and enthuse members of the B.S.A.P., so as to try and persuade at least some of them to get out into the field and jot down valuable, well directed and scientifically considered observations on the birds of their political State of Andhra Pradesh, at least. Two years have gone by since I began sending my Letters to Aasheesh Pittie, who had requested them, but I am utterly disappointed with the almost total lack of response from readers. However, I will go on writing and hope that I can excite and inform at least *one* youngster with a passion for his birds, just as I was 'smitten' by writings of early Europeans and the legendary Sálim Ali, when I was young and happened to stumble into and then wallow in an ocean of Natural History literature which was there for the asking some 3-4 decades ago, and still is, for those who bother to look.

September 17th of this year marked the 50th anniversary of the merger of the Nizaam's Dominions of Hyderabad with the Indian Union, a year after most other Princely States acceded and India became independent. As a biological scientist, I fail to understand why *political* units are used to demarcate ranges of animals or plants and to document their distributions—"Birds of Pakistan", "Flora of Karnataka", "Dermaptera of Darjeeling District", *etc., etc., ad nauseum*. Doing this is ridiculous, as it distorts biological facts and actual physical geography, providing the least relevant database on the subject being investigated. Compiling "A Checklist of Birds of Andhra Pradesh" or of Maharashtra, like writing an "Avifauna of Sholapur District" is, to me, a pitiable commentary on our so-called 'scientific' attitude, which has conditioned us to ignore the natural and accept the artificial in anything we do. 'Common names' thus take priority over scientific nomenclature which actually demonstrates phylogenetic relationships. 'Conservation' of wildlife in Protected Areas which *we* demarcate for 'God's creatures' (naturally evolved other life forms) is attracting funding and media attention, while *research* on our Natural History (Zoology and Botany), urgently needed to *understand* what biodiversity *exists*, is pathetically under-funded and devalued today, to our peril! This *must stop* and I am going to try and educate concerned and interested persons before it is too late.

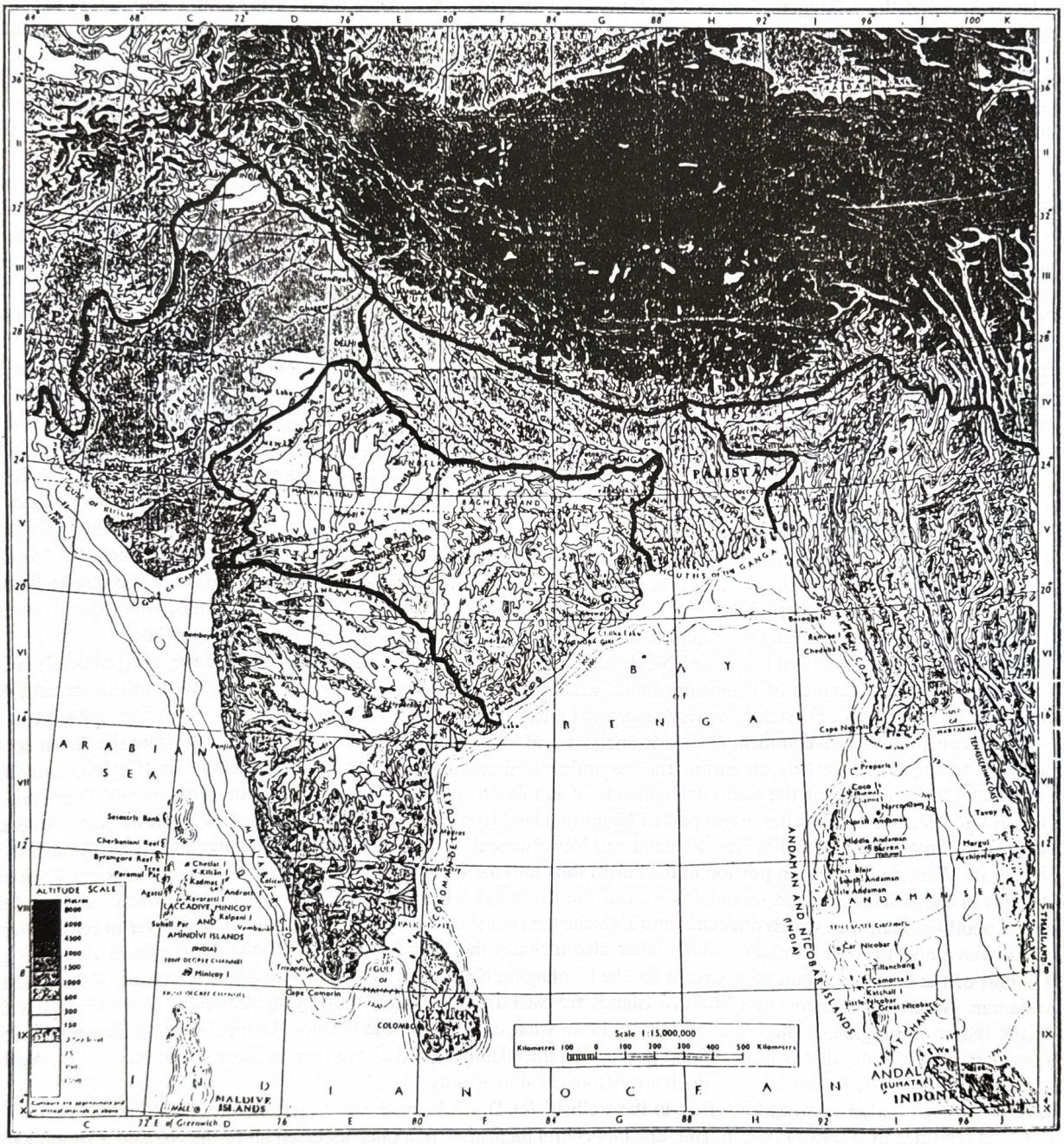
The map (p. 4) indicates the natural biogeographical areas of the Indian sub-continent. The island of Ceylon (politically Sri Lanka) is a biogeographical area of the province of Peninsular India, which also includes the Western Ghats, the Deccan Plateau and the Eastern Ghats—Carnatic Plain areas. E.M. Forster's *Dravidia* (see my Letter # 11, *Pitta* # 80, December 1997) which corresponds to a section of the once southern hemisphere super-continent of Gondwanaland, and known as the *Indian Plate*, 'ploughed' into the Asian continent and raised the highest, youngest, mountains on earth—the magnificent Himalayas. Besides Peninsular India and Ceylon, *Dravidia* (Indian Plate) also includes the large area of the Central Highlands. It is this *Dravidia* which possesses the *real* 'Indian' fauna and flora that evolved on the Indian Plate, or even earlier, when part of Gondwanaland (comprising also of what we now know as South America, Africa, Arabia, Madagascar, Antarctica, Australia, New Zealand and New Guinea), and where our *true endemics* live today. Almost the whole of Pakistan (barring its Western Himalayan portion in the north) falls into the Plain of the Indus area including the adjacent Rann of Cutch—Thar Desert Plain in India. The hills and mountains west of the River Indus belong to the Trans-Indus area which also includes southern Afghanistan and south-eastern Iran which dovetails into Baluchistan (not shown on map). The Kali-Gandak River in central Nepal divides the Western Himalaya and Eastern Himalaya which latter also includes the Kingdom of Bhutan and northernmost Burma. Again, all of Bangladesh is part of the Gangetic Plain area, except for the Chittagong Hill Tracts in its south-east which are part of the Assam—Burma area. The Andaman, Nicobar, Laccadive and Maldive Islands are each distinct oceanic biogeographical areas which identify with the flora and fauna of the Indian Subregion of the Oriental Region. From what is known of the Chagos Archipelago (not shown on map), it has a biodiversity, even if depauperate, that is more related to those on the islands named above than to those on the Seychelles, Agalega, Mauritius and Reunion islands in the Indian Ocean, which are Afrotropical in affinity.

As I have mentioned earlier, it would be 'frog-in-the-wellish' for B.S.A.P. members to restrict their bird interest to those seen only within the political confines of Andhra Pradesh. But, one biogeographical area, that once included all of the Nizaam's Dominions, could be profitably targeted for the study of its avifauna, *etc.*—the *Deccan Plateau*. The beautiful Blackbuck, a *true endemic* of our sub-continent (unlike the 'tendulkarized' tiger!), Sykes' Crested Lark, and the red flowered leguminous undershrub *Tephrosia pentaphylla* Roxburgh, are typical inhabitants of the Deccan ('Dukhun') Trap Plateau which, besides Telengana, the Bombay and Hyderabad Karnatak, Bombay Deccan, Khandesh and Berar, also covers the Satpura Range and Malwa Plateau areas, to the north of Peninsular India, in the western portion of the Central Highlands. It is a pity that this singularly Indian geological area has *not* been the focus of modern field biologists, to survey, sample and prepare detailed inventories of the biodiversity occurring in the uniquely Indian DECCAN PLATEAU ecosystem.

Colonel W.H. Sykes, who named *Galerida deva* (# 902), and many other peninsular Indian birds, wrote the first "Catalogue of the Birds of the Deccan" in 1832 (*Proceedings of the Zoological Society*, pp. 77 & 149), and this pioneering 'Deccan database' was then followed up by Dr T.C. Jerdon (1839-1840, 1844), the Reverend S.B. Fairbank (1876), C.S. Davidson & C.E. Wenden (1878), Captain E.A. Butler (1881), J. Davidson (1882), and J. Macgregor (1887), in the last century. Sálim Ali & Whistler's (1933-1934) Hyderabad

State avifauna, Sálim Ali's *first* regional survey, covered only Telengana and part of the Bombay Deccan. His plans to set up camps in Marathwada (Bombay Deccan) and in what is now Raichur District (Hyderabad Karnatak) aborted. Mrs M.D. Wright (1942) wrote on the birds of Berar, N. Majumdar (1984) on Adilabad District, A. Mahabal & B.S. Lamba (1987) on Poona (*Pune* in native tongue) and vicinity, and Mahabal (1989) on Sholapur District. These works are all that has really been done, *in extenso*, on the avifauna of the peninsula's Deccan Plateau. M.S. Mani (1974, *Ecology and Biogeography in India*, pp. 614-647, W. Junk, The Hague) gave an account of the biogeography of the Peninsula.

The INDIAN HANDBOOK tried to summarize data on the entire sub-continent's birds (minus Burma), an area too vast for anyone to do real justice to. We need to carry out detailed, extensive field studies (and publish books) on the birds of *each* of the above mentioned biogeographical areas and sub-areas, before the next comprehensive *Fauna* volumes (3rd Edition) can be written, including these substantial new additions to our avifaunal database. We must also prepare scholarly analyses of our birds' taxonomy, biology, ecology, phylogeny, biogeography and evolution, based on them. Can our contemporary bird watchers help us achieve this?



[**Errata Letter # 18** — Line 3 of Text Para 1 should read "(1872-1888)", last line of Para 1 "paläarktischen", line 8 of Para 2 delete ' " ', line 6 from bottom of Para 2 "in the".

Letter # 19 — Line 4 of Quotation should read "and Indians", line 14 of Quotation "*Bombay* and *A Naturalist*", line 15 "last sixty years", line 2 of Text Para 2 "think need a little", line 10 of Para 2 "starting page", line 6 of Para 3 "Natural History", line 7 of Para 3 "The *Jour-*", line 10 of Para 3 "first in India", line 6 of Para 4 "birthday in September, that" and "do wish the B.N.H.S.", and line 10 of References "The Bombay".

Letter # 20 — Line 2 of Quotation should read "Latin names", line 3 of 2nd Quotation should read "or particularly", line 3 of Text Para 1 should read "scientists and others", line 1 of Para 2 should read "published his *Species*", line 7 of Para 2 should read "make the working", line 6 of Para 3 should read "clature of our avifauna, from Hugh Whistler and Stuart Baker to Dillon Ripley and Humayun Abdulali has muddled", line 5 of Para 4 should read "through Baker, Whistler and Ticehurst"]

Dr Kumar Ghorpadé, P.O. Box 8439, Bangalore 560 084 & e-mail: varanus.kg@mailcity.com

Continued from page 2.

Bird Banding Training Programme for 1998-1999 season

Bombay Natural History Society

1. 18-12-98 to 6-1-99: Point Calimere, Tamil Nadu & Parambikulam, Kerala. 10 days each.
2. 18-1-99 to 6-2-99: Parambikulam, Kerala & Point Calimere, Tamil Nadu. 10 days each.
3. 14-2-99 to 6-3-99: Harike, Punjab & Aligarh, Uttar Pradesh. 10 days each.
4. 14-3-99 to 3-4-99: Water birds—Point Calimere, Tamil Nadu & Forest Birds—Tirupati Hills, Andhra Pradesh. 10 days each.

The objectives of this programme are to give training to suitable persons in bird trapping, safe handling of trapped birds, identification, ringing, taking accurate measurements of birds and maintaining data sheets, and to train participants in conducting a bird census. Training for 20 days is compulsory and certificates will be issued to those who complete a 20-day course. The registration fee for a 20-day camp is Rs. 1000/- inclusive of training materials and rings. If the course is split into 2 parts of 10 days each, this fee is Rs. 1500/-. Boarding and lodging will have to be paid at the field station and should not be more than Rs. 100/- per day. For further details please contact Hon. Secretary, BSAP or Dr S Balachandran, Scientist, BNHS, Hornbill House, Dr Sálim Ali Chowk, Shaheed Bhagat Singh Road, Mumbai 400 023. Tel: 022-2821811. Fax: 2837615. Email: bnhs@bom3.vsnl.net.in. This is a unique opportunity, which every serious Indian bird-watcher should grab. Trained persons can then conduct ringing camps in their areas and strengthen the work of that BNHS has done by itself (ringing about 500,000 birds) for the last 40 years.

The **Asian Waterfowl Census** (AWC)-1999 will be conducted in India from 9th to 24th January 1999 (both days inclusive). As in the previous years, the Society will be participating in this activity in Andhra Pradesh. All those members who would like to take part in this activity are requested to contact the Regional Coordinator, Siraj A. Taher, as soon as possible to coordinate and finalize the programme for the AWC. The Count Unit Forms and Site Forms will be posted to volunteers before end of December 1998.

Guidelines for Asian Waterfowl Census-1999

1. Counts can be made any time between 1st and 30th January 1999 but preferably between 9th and 24th January (both days inclusive).
2. Count the same sites as in previous years. In case the counts have been less than 300 birds for last 3 years simultaneously, then alternate site/s may be selected. Counts from 'good' new sites are welcome.
3. All important water-bodies covered in A.P. in the earlier years should be counted. A list of all such areas will be sent to you with the Count Forms.
4. Try to give the geographic coordinates as far as possible. If this is not possible, then give the distance/direction to the nearest important village/town/city.
5. Follow the *Guidelines Sheet* sent along with the forms.

The final notification for designating **Kasu Brahmananda Reddy National Park** as a *National Park*, was issued by the Government of Andhra Pradesh *vide* their G.O.M.S. 187 dated 3-12-1998 gazetted in Andhra Pradesh Gazette # 511 dated 5-12-1998.

Members may purchase an updated copy of the Society's **Memorandum of Rules and Regulations** for Rs. 20/- each. A Xeroxed copy will be mailed on receipt payment (cash/ MO).

World Wetland Day (WWD) is observed on 2nd February every year to commemorate the signing of the International Convention on Wetlands at Ramsar, Iran, in 1971. There are many ways in which this day can be highlighted at the state or local level. Ideally, NGOs and individual members can do any of the following:

- Issue press releases or write letters to newspapers stressing the importance of wetlands.
- Promote display of books on wetlands at the school or local library.
- Arrange birdwatching trips to the nearest wetland or give a talk at some school or institution.
- Arrange a photo/painting exhibition highlighting a wetland especially of a Ramsar site, if any, in your area.

Wishing everyone a very happy and prosperous New Year, filled with lots of wonderful bird-watching!

BIRDING NOTES *Compiled by Aasheesh Pittie*

This column publishes birding notes in brief telegraphic form, from **Andhra Pradesh, Goa, Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra & Tamil Nadu** on interesting and significant sightings and behaviour like breeding, feeding, migration, nesting, etc. Notes on flowering and fruiting trees and their relationship with birds are also welcome. English names and classification follow, S.D. Ripley's *A Synopsis of the Birds of India and Pakistan* (1982, 2nd ed.) and scientific nomenclature, T. Inskipp, N. Lindsey & W. Duckworth's *An Annotated Checklist of the Birds of the Oriental Region* (1996). Unless specified, all observations are for 1998. Abbreviations, Contributors, Notes, Regional Referees, etc., are at the end. For selection of breeding criteria 'Probable, Possible, Confirmed', see *Pitta* # 82, February 1998, p. 4.

ANDHRA PRADESH

CHITTOOR DISTRICT

Krishnamurti Sagar, Horsley Hills Reserve Forest 13.9 (VS): SHORT-TOED EAGLE 3; BROWN SHRIKE 1; WHITEBELLIED DRONGO 1; YELLOWTHROATED BULBUL 2; SLATYHEADED SCIMITAR BABBLER hrd.

PTM Tank & surrounds 24.11 (VS & SR): LARGE CORMORANT 50+; PURPLE HERON 1; PINTAIL 100+; TAWNY EAGLE 2; KESTREL 2; COOT CB, ad with 5-6 yng; GREAT HORNED OWL 1; ROSY PASTOR 100+.

Rishi Valley (VS): DABCHICK 30.11: PRB, in br+ plm; SPOTBILL DUCK 29.8: 2; CRESTED HONEY BUZZARD 18.7: 2; BESRA SPARROW-HAWK 30.11: 1 M; PALE HARRIER 30.11: 1; WHITEBREAST-ED WATERHEN 30.11: CB, 2 yng; LITTLE BROWN DOVE 30.11: POB, courtship disp.; PIED CRESTED CUCKOO 19.7: hrd; SIRKEER CUCKOO 19.7: 1; GREAT HORNED OWL 6.10: hrd; BROWN FISH-OWL 1.10: hrd; ALPINE SWIFT 28.6: 1; GREY HORNBILL 1.9: 1; COPPERSMITH 7.6: PRB, mating; BLACK-BACKED WOODPECKER 31.5: 3; INDIAN PITTA 9.10: hrd; COMMON SWALLOW 29.8: 2 in flt, heading south; BLACK DRONGO 23.8: birds with moulting tails; HAIRCRESTED DRONGO 30.11: 5-6; REDVENTED BULBUL 20.6: CB, carrying food in bill; BROWN FLYCATCHER 30.6: hrd, 15.7: hrd; REDBREASTED FLYCATCHER 9.10: 2; BLUE-

THROATED FLYCATCHER 12.10: hrd; PARADISE FLYCATCHER 2.10: hrd; BLACKNAPED MONARCH FLYCATCHER 30.11: 2 hrd; FRANKLIN'S PRINIA 30.11: PRB, in br+ plm; PLAIN PRINIA 30.11: CB, pair with 3 yng; JUNGLE PRINIA 29.8: PRB, with N-mat; TAILOR BIRD 1.8: CB, with fecal sac; THICK-BILLED WARBLER 30.11: 1 hrd; BLYTH'S REED WARBLER 30.11: LESSER WHITETHROAT 30.11; GREENISH LEAF WARBLER 9.9: 2 hrd; MAGPIE-ROBIN 20.7: POB, in song; FOREST WAGTAIL 20, 23, 24.9: hrd; GREY WAGTAIL 16.9: 1; PURPLE-RUMPED SUNBIRD 17.7, 30.11: 2 different N under const; LOTEN'S SUNBIRD 30.11: PRB, with N-mat; PURPLE SUNBIRD M in eclipse plm; SPOTTED MUNIA 15,29.8: CB, 2 N on transformer.

HYDERABAD DISTRICT

Banjara Hills 12.11 (SU): BLACK REDSTART 1M.

Kasu Brahmananda Reddy National Park 30.11 (AP, SK): ROSY PASTOR 7 ad., & imm. RUFOUSBACKED SHRIKE[1] 4; REDBREASTED FLYCATCHER 1; LESSER WHITETHROAT 1; SPOTTED MUNIA CB, unspotted juv., with ad.

MAHBUBNAGAR DISTRICT

Uma Maheshwaram, Achampet 22.11 (AP): GREY JUNGLEFOWL hrd; GREEN PIGEON 4; EMERALD DOVE 1; SMALL GREENBILLED MALKOHA; LARGE GREEN BARBET; BLACKHEADED ORIOLE; GREY DRONGO; WHITEBELLIED DRONGO; YELLOWTHROATED BULBUL; VERDITER FLYCATCHER.

MEDAK DISTRICT

Bollarum 13.11 (HT): MONTAGU'S HARRIER 1M.

RANGAREDDI DISTRICT

Jalpally Tank & Kotha Cheruvu (ST): GREY HERON 2; SPOTBILL DUCK 6; PAINTED PARTRIDGE hrd.

Madhapur 15.11 (ST, HT): SCAVENGER VULTURE 8.

Mamidipally: KESTREL[2] 25.10: 1F trapped, ringed & released [BNHS. "C"-44908] (HT, HJ). **26.7: (HJ)** PAINTED PARTRIDGE; JUNGLE BUSH-QUAIL; PIED CRESTED CUCKOO; SHIKRA PRB, 1 imm F; YELLOW-WATTLED LAPWING CB, ad., with yng; BONELLI'S EAGLE; GREAT HORNED OWL; COMMON HAWK-CUCKOO 7.

Rourial Tank 10.8 (HJ): COMMON SANDPIPER 5.

MAHARASHTRA

NASHIK DISTRICT

Gangapur Dam (BR): **6.10:** GARGANEY TEAL 25. **8.10:** BLACK REDSTART 2; **12.10:** SPOONBILL 5; GREEN SANDPIPER 2. **14.10:** LITTLE CORMORANT 250; GREY HERON 2; SHOVELLER 22; BROWNHEADED GULL 4; BLACKHEADED GULL 12. **16.10:** HEN HARRIER 2; PALE HARRIER 2; MARSH HARRIER 2; KESTREL 2; STONE CHAT 8. **23.10:** GREYNECKED BUNTING 6. **25.10:** GREY WAGTAIL 14.

Ozar (H.A.L. Factory) (BR): GREAT INDIAN BUSTARD 2.10: 2M, 2F, 1 yng; 8.10: 2M, 1F; LESSER FLORICAN 2.10: PRB, 1M disp. 8.10: PRB, 1M disp.

ABBREVIATIONS: Ab-abundant; ad-adult/s; br-breeding; C-common/ly; CB-confirmed breeding; const-construction/ing; *c.*-approximately; disp-display/ing; F-female; flt-flight; fly-family; freq-frequent/ly; hrd-heard; id-identify/ied; imm-immature; inc-include/ing; Is-Island; juv-juvenile; LM-local migrant; M-male; mat-material; N-nest/ing/s; POB-possible breeding; PRB-probable breeding; plm-plumage; RF-Reserve Forest; Resp-respectively; Tlk-Taluk; vil-village; WL-wildlife; yng-young.

CONTRIBUTORS: A Pittie (AP); B Raha (BR); H Jaffer (HJ); H Taher (HT); S Kapadia (SK); S Rangaswami (SR); S Ulla (SU); V Santharam (VS).

NOTES: [1]Greybacked race *Lanius schach caniceps*. [2]For measurements contact BSAP.

REGIONAL REFEREES: Andhra Pradesh: A Pittie; Goa: H Lainer; Karnataka: JN Prasad; Kerala: PO Nameer; Maharashtra: N Jamdar; Tamil Nadu: V Santharam.

PROGRAMME

FIELD OUTING: 10-1-1999: Palmakole Tank, Mahbubnagar district: Members are requested to reach the destination by 7.30am. Palmakole village is *c.* 30km from Hyderabad on the Bangalore highway (NH#7). This will be a half-day trip.

24-1-1999: Pocharam Lake, Medak district: We start from Shanbhag hotel, Panjagutta, at 7.00hrs sharp. Transport will be arranged for members only on first-cum-first-served basis. Book seats with the President/Hon.Secretary. This will be a full day trip.

INDOOR MEETING: 18-1-199, 6 p.m.: Vidyaranya High School, Opp., Secretariat, Saifabad, Hyderabad 500004.

CORRESPONDENCE

"30% of the **Rourial Lake (Rangareddi Dist., A.P.)** bed, was under Jowar cultivation this year. The abundant monsoon submerged half of this crop just before it could be harvested. **Roseringed Parakeets** *Psittacula krameri* are feeding on this crop in a thousand-strong flock. The lake seems to be 'polly-ted' with the birds!"

Hyder Jaffer 10.8.1998

"Lainer's **European Roller** from **Catigao** *isn't* the 'southern-most record'; Subramanya recorded it near **Ranibennur** in 1984, and perhaps later also seen near **Bangalore**?"

Dr Kumar Ghorpadé 3.12.1998

"I always take a little time to look at *Pitta*. I am writing this regarding issue no. 92 Dec 1998 in which H. Lainer has seen **European Roller** in Goa and claims that it is the southern most record after 1893. Incidentally, I have seen this bird in **Uttar Kannada** twice between 1990-91. Once in **Gokarna** which is south of Karvar and the second time in a place near **Bhatkal** between Uttara and Dakshina Kannada."

Dr Ranjit Daniels 4.12.1998

For Private Circulation Only

For more information write to: Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh, PO Box 45, Banjara Hills PO, Hyderabad 500034, India.

Editors: Aasheesh Pittie (3350683) & Siraj A Taher (3352607) **E-mail**: AASHEESH@HD1.VSNL.NET.IN

Illustrations: Sachin Jaltare. Uma Maheshwaram landscape: p. 1; Yellowthroated Bulbul *Pycnonotus xantholaemus*: p. 2.

Membership (Rs): Admission=20; Ordinary=100, Student=25 per annum; Life=1,000. *Outstation cheques not accepted.*

PITTA

Bulletin of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh **No. 94 : February 1999**

6/2/99

PROGRAMME

Received 16/2/1999

FIELD OUTING: 21-2-1999: ICRISAT Asia Center, Patancheru, Medak district: Members are requested to reach the destination by 7.30am and assemble at the main gate. Transportation within the campus will be arranged. Lunch will be provided on to-pay basis. This will be a full-day trip.

INDOOR MEETING: 15-2-1999, 6 p.m.: Video film on **Jurong Bird Park**, Singapore and discussion on the BSAP project. Vidyaranya High School, Opp., Secretariat, Saifabad, Hyderabad 500004.

NOTES & NEWS

Field Trip to **Bibinagar Tank**, 27 December 1998
J.V.D. Moorty

The "first railway crossing" after Ghatkesar actually meant the 'second' one at the crossroads leading to Pochampalli, with the Bibinagar tank glistening on the left. Waiting for others to arrive is always a hungry period and the ubiquitous roadside cafe provided the required fare. With energy renewed and the others having joined us we headed for the shores of the tank. The huge mass of water meant that birding would be at a premium and so it was. Little Grebes *Tachybaptus ruficollis* ducking in and out of the water provided the opening spectacle. The newer members and the children on the trip were treated to Little Cormorants *Phalacrocorax niger* fishing, then juggling the catch around so that they could swallow them head first. A couple of Common Sandpipers *Tringa hypoleucos* and a lone Little Ringed Plover *Charadrius dubius* were immediately focussed upon. On the far shore, about a kilometer and a half away, one could make out a flock of Blackwinged Stilts *Himantopus himantopus*, in meditation. A Median Egret *Egretta intermedia* winged its way languidly across, wing tips teasingly close to the surface of the water. Ashy Crowned Finch-Larks *Eremopterix grisea* delivered their song from above. A pair of Sykes' Crested Larks *Galerida deva* passed overhead in their undulating flight. Bhardwaj was delighted to spy his namesake, a Coucal *Centropus sinensis* (known as *Bhardwaj* in Hindi), in a *babool*!

It was then decided to move along further down the road towards another water body, Raigir Tank, on the way to Yadgirigutta. Driving past a Blackwinged Kite *Elanus caeruleus* standing vigil on a telegraph pole and with the wires punctuated with Indian Rollers *Coracias benghalensis* and Small Green Bee-eaters *Merops orientalis*, Sushil, who was leading the convoy, discovered another eatery, and it was chow-time again. The road leading to Yadgirigutta is not very wide but it sure does have spectacular rock formations on either side. A Small Greenbilled Malkoha *Phaenicophaeus viridirostris* was seen disappearing into some thick roadside foliage. About 10 minutes of driving brought us to the water body on the left. The first birds that attracted our attention were sixteen Black Ibis *Pseudibis papillosa* and 23 Painted Storks *Ibis leucocephalus* perched on the branches of an Acacia tree that stood in water and seemed to border most margins of the tank. Swimming blissfully was a flock of Common Pochards *Aythya ferina* almost camouflaging a lone Tufted Pochard *Aythya fuligula*. Six Pintails *Anas acuta* preferred the solitude of the shadows of a factory on the western shores of the tank. Having seen what was on offer we decide to try out another lake near Ghatkesar about 3 km off the main highway.

The water was full up and fields around it were doing quite well too. The near shores had Large Cormorants *Phalacrocorax carbo* sunning on a small outcrop. A Large Egret *Ardea alba* was busy fishing, accompanied by a retinue of median and little egrets. Far, far away a flock of Painted Storks was just about discernible through the lenses of my 10x50.

The sun was getting high as we turned back, thinking how the large quantities of water in most lakes and tanks of Andhra Pradesh, owing to the rather good monsoon this year, had affected waterbird populations. Of course, the water bodies did support marine life, but the sheer volume of water content was putting off most birds. Perhaps due to the emergent vegetation (on which these birds feed) dying as sunlight did not reach it! Maybe we should make another trip to these places in March when the return migration is on, to see what we may surely have missed this time around.

News of new species!

"A new species, an as yet unnamed **forest robin** sp., was collected in the republic (**Central African Republic**) in November 1996 (22nd International Ornithological Congress).

"A new species, the **Moheli Scops Owl** *Otus moheliensis*, has been described from the island of **Moheli** (**Comoros Islands**); the population is estimated at *c*.400 individuals [*World Birdwatch* 20(4)/*J. Afr. Zool.* 112: 163].

"A new species, the **Nicobar Scops Owl** *Otus alius*, has been described from **Great Nicobar Island** (**India**), based on the only two birds known—single specimens collected in 1966 and 1977 (*Bull. BOC* 118: 141-153*).

"A new species of rail, the **Talaud Bush Hen** *Amaurornis magnirostris*, has been described from **Karakelong Island**, in the **Talaud Islands**; it differs from its congeners by its darker plumage and considerably larger bill (*Bull. BOC* 118: 67-82).

"A new species, the **Ancient Antwren** *Herpsilochmus gentryi*, has been described from **Amazonian Peru** and nearby **Ecuador**; it differs from its congeners in a number of features including having entirely yellow underparts (*The Auk*, July 1998)." [*Birding World* 11(12): 458]

***Editors' Note:** Quoting from the paper, "The name *alius*, which is Latin for 'other' (this being another Scops-owl from the Nicobar Islands), encapsulates the family name of Mr **Humayun Abdulali**,

who first collected this species, and contributed a great deal to Indian ornithology, and in particular that of the Andaman and Nicobar islands."

"I attended the 18th Maharashtra State and First All India Bird Watchers Convention (*Akhil Bharatiya Pakshi Mitra Sammelan*) in **Karad, Maharashtra**, as a representative of the BSAP. Before the inauguration of the *Sammelan*, a procession (*dindi*) was organized on Trees (*Vruksha Dindi*) and Birds (*Pakshi Dindi*), as its twin-themes. A thousand school children participated by carrying environmental slogans and models of birds. This procession wound through the main roads in the town and drew considerable public attention. The enthusiastic volunteers were mostly students of various junior colleges in the town.

"The *Sammelan* was for three days. The first two days comprised of an inauguration of the *Sammelan* by VIPs, discussions on sightings of specific birds, slide shows by Shri Milind Gupte and Shri Sharad Apte. Shri Gupte, Dr Satish Pande and Shri Kiran Purandare arranged a photo exhibition.

"Four hundred and fifty delegates participated in the *Sammelan*, representing all the districts of Maharashtra. A few delegates from other parts of the country were also present. On the last day of the conference, delegates were taken to the famous earthquake-prone Koyna Dam. We visited the backwaters and a picturesque waterfall near the dam. This was a meticulously planned and well-arranged trip for about 200 bird-watchers.

"There was an unique bonhomie and sense of belonging between all delegates and I could not help thinking that 'birds of a feather *indeed* flock together'! Participation during sessions was intense and approximately 1,000 people from all walks of life, sat absorbed with the proceedings throughout the sessions. This dedicated participation is noteworthy and exhibits the interest of people in bird watching and the potential for organizing similar *Sammelans* in other parts of the country. I am sure that many serious bird watchers would have been born in the town called Karad!"

MS Kulkarni

"A **Poouli** *Melamprosops phaeosoma*, a Hawaiian honeycreeper from **Maui** with possibly as few as three individuals in existence, has been trapped and the adult plumage described for the first time (*World Birdwatch* 20(4)/*Wilson Bulletin* 110: 307)."
[*Birding World* 11(12): 458]

The fastest **Peregrine** stoop has been recorded by "the respected Professor Jim Enderson of Colorado Springs University, USA, and his colleague Vance Tucker are quoted in the newly published book *In Pursuit of the Peregrine* by Dick Treleaven as recording the astonishing figure of speeds in excess of 324km/hour."
[*Birding World* 11(12): 485]

"A **hawk** with a transmitter fitted on its talon, which had apparently strayed from **Pakistan** into the Indian border, was caught by the police at Shahgarh in **Jaisalmer district**. The bird is suspected to be accompanying a hunting party in the desert on the other side of the border.

"...the hawk was spotted relaxing on the cable antenna of Shahgarh police station on Monday last. When the policemen saw a long wire hanging out of its tail, they caught it... The hawk was later brought to Jaisalmer and has been kept in police custody. The police say it was possible that a group of Arab Sheikhs, carrying the hawks, may be touring the border districts of Sind in Pakistan on a hunting jaunt. A similar excursion by Arab Sheikhs in the Thar Desert on the Indian side in the mid-70s—in which they had hunted the Great Indian Bustards...in Jaisalmer and Barmer districts—had led to a public outcry, following which the desert safaris of Arab Sheikhs were banned.

"The hawk, which has been kept in the Jaisalmer city police station, is being given meat regularly...the police were searching the rule books to find out if it could be returned at the border itself." [*The Hindu* 3.12.1998 Jaipur]

Rishi Valley is organizing a Field Study course for bird watchers (see "Contact Notes", below). Participants will have to bear the cost of travel and food. Accommodation is free. Please contact Hon. Secretary if you are interested, for further details.

THE *GARRULAX* CORNER

It is said that when **M. Krishnan** was introduced to **S. Dillon Ripley**, he quipped, "I've heard such a lot about you, I don't know whether to believe it or not!"
The following anecdotes (contributed by M Shafaat Ulla, are from "*Ripley's Believe It or Not*!"

- A three-month old baby **pelican** weighs more than a full-grown adult pelican!
- The **Bateleur Eagle** of Africa, while hunting, flies over a 250 square mile area every day!
- **Green Herons** catch fish using live insects as bait!
- An **Ostrich's** eye is bigger than its brain!

LITERARY WRENDITIONS

Nahin terá nashéman
Qasr-é-sultáni ki gumbad par
Tu ***Sháhin*** *hai basérá kar*
Pahádon ki chattánon par
Iqbal

"Your home is not on the dome of the King's palace
You are the Shaheen (the hunter)—
Go and live on the rocks of hills (or mountains)"

[This is Iqbal's timeless clarion call to the human spirit (*Sháheen*), to rise above the illusion of petty materialism and temporal worldliness].

CONTACT NOTES

"We will be conducting a field study course during 7th to 10th April, excluding dates of arrival and departure. Participants will meet only food charges and their travel expenses. We would like to keep three or four places for members sponsored by you. In case the proposal interests you, kindly drop a line to enable us to finalise arrangements." —*S. Rangaswami, Rishi Valley*

LETTER FROM AN INSECT-HUNTING ORNITHOLOGIST—22

"In this catalogue I propose to include every species, so far as this is known to me, which has been observed in any part of India, including Cashmere, Nepaul, Sikhim, and other Hill States, Ladak and Yarkand, Arracan, Burmah, and the Tenasserim Provinces, Assam and Cachar, Ceylon, the Andamans, and the Nicobars.

In this present work, which only pretends to be a first draft, I cannot undertake to work out the synonymy of the various species, about 1,500 in number. Each will be entered under the name that, as at present informed, (and that is very imperfectly) has, I believe, priority . . . . ."

". . . . . Still, I am assured that, notwithstanding this serious drawback, this catalogue will be of great use, not only to the numerous gentlemen who so kindly collect for me, but also to others interested in Indian Ornithology, and that it will serve as a sort of basis upon which hereafter some abler ornithologist, less occupied with other matters than myself, may produce some more worthy record of our Indian Avifauna." [A.O. Hume, 1872, *Stray Feathers*, 1: 49-50]

"The Ornithological Section of the Vernay Survey, which commenced woirk in April 1929, obtained fair series of the commoner birds, and the collection was reported upon by Hugh Whistler & N.B. Kinnear in the Society's *Journal*. This report is still an indispensable work of reference for any study of Indian birds, for the authors had access not only to the earlier literature, but also to the specimens collected by giants like Jerdon and Hume and they not only published their findings but also discussed the evidence examined by them . . . . "

"When working out my collections from the Andamans, I could not help being struck by the fact that many specimens did not agree with the accounts in current literature. . . . . "

"This work has been and continues to be interesting and many unexpected discoveries have turned up . . . . . The paucity of specimens from several parts of India is patent and I can only hope that these notes will prompt all those who have the opportunity, to help complete the Society's collection . . . . . Our taxonomic studies are far from complete; the days of random collecting for most districts have gone, but specimens of different species are needed from many areas and the work can only be completed with the help of individuals in different places. The Society's collection with all its gaps is one of the best in the country and is intended to form the base of many taxonomic and other studies in India." [H. Abdulali, 1968, *J.B.N.H.S.*, 65: 182-184]

"The region covered by the Oriental Bird Club (OBC) contains 2,586 species (25.7% of the world's total) . . . . . a recent summary of the taxonomic status of the region's birds does not exist. The birds of many countries within the region have been covered in recent reviews, dealing mainly with identification, distribution and conservation status, but the taxonomic information in these sources is often limited. The taxonomic data for some bird taxa of the less well-known countries are scattered through a wide range of publications, some dating back to the last century. Recent checklists of the birds of the world provide only patchy information on taxonomic decisions, or in some cases none at all. For many species or species groups, therefore, no modern taxonomic review exists. However, informed taxonomic discussion is a prerequisite for the study of birds, including the formulation of conservation decisions, and as a basis for comparative zoological studies (Brooks & McLennan, 1991)."

[T. Inskipp, N. Lindsey & W. Duckworth, 1996, *An Annotated Checklist of the Birds of the Oriental Region*, p.1]

The above quotations span a century and a quarter, and epitomize the status of basic ornithological research done on Indian birds so far. The Table inserted in this Letter (see p. 4) is taken from my UPDATED CHECKLIST (1998, *Humea, Field Ornithology*, # 6) and illustrates the current known diversity of our Avifauna in the "Indian region" (*fide* S.D. Ripley, 1961, OLD SYNOPSIS, *et seq.),* expressed as number of Orders, Genera and Species now known from this geographical area. Endemic genera and species, the kinds of birds *found only here and nowhere else in the world*, are also indicated, in parenthesis.

Two octogenarians, of 1st World War vintage, Sidney Dillon Ripley ['anointed' a Sikh, and named "Dhillon" recently, by Saraswathy Unnithan (*lapsus calami*?) in *NLBW* 38(5): 89!] and Humayun Abdulali, remain the most knowledgeable and experienced bird taxonomists on Indian sub-continent ornithology. This Letter is also a personal salute to these elderly gentlemen, whom, curiously, I have never met (!), but whose work I have great respect for, and have benefited from immensely. I think it a pity that Sálim Ali became 'tendulkarized' in his old age (though not 'commercially corrupted', since his 'career', a hobby actually, isn't a money-spinning one!), to the relative obscurity of his other productive ornithologist colleagues. Sálim Ali had himself 'selected' Abdulali and Ripley as two (now only surviving!) of his "Five Other Men" that titled Chapter 19 of his own story that was 'told' by him so well [1985, "The Fall of a Sparrow" (not 'Petronia' please!), pp. 178-194]. Schoolboy Humayun became his *chela* in the 1920s and post-graduate Dillon introduced himself to Sálim Ali in 1944, when the 2nd World War was still on. Ripley deserves much more genuine gratitude from Indian sub-continent bird watchers, at least, for it was his fortuitous (?) meeting with Sálim Ali that enabled them to begin working together and give us the SYNOPSIS, INDIAN (COMPACT) HANDBOOK, and PICTORIAL GUIDE, which are still basic references to our Ornithology, besides the recently published ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY as well. Abdulali's B.N.H.S. BIRD COLLECTION CATALOGUE, still sadly unfinished, after three whole decades (!), and his comprehensive work on the Andaman & Nicobar Islands Avifauna, are very important databases for any serious bird watcher here. His work with Sálim Ali on the birds of Hyderabad State (field work only), and of Bombay and Salsette, also needs to be better appreciated. Still more strength to their elbows (as M. Krishnan used to say to me) and good health into the next century, to these distinguished ornithologist 'gurus' – Salaams, gentlemen!

I have selected the above three quotations to also emphasize the *still incomplete status* of the systematics and basic natural history of the 1,382 species so far discovered as native to, or as migrants, stragglers, vagrants or accidentals, to our region. Sálim Ali's "Ornithology in India. It's Past, Present and Future" (1971, *Science & Culture*, 37: 358-367) is perhaps the best historical summation of basic ornithological observations and research carried out here, and should be read by every serious bird watcher who intends to add to the database available on the occurrences and lives of our bird diversity. Other accounts are in T.C. Jerdon's Introduction to his THE BIRDS OF INDIA (1862, Vol. 1, xlv pp., see especially pp. xxxix-xlv), E.C. Stuart Baker's NEW FAUNA (1922, Vol. 1, pp. 1-4), S.D. Ripley's OLD SYNOPSIS (1961, pp. v-ix, xxvii-xxviii), Sálim Ali & Ripley's INDIAN HANDBOOK (1968, Vol. 1, pp. xvii-liv), and Ripley's NEW SYNOPSIS (1982, pp. v-vi, xviii-xix, 576-579). Though Tim Inskipp, Nigel Lindsey & William Duckworth have cited many of the important books and articles on Oriental birds published this century, there was no updated historical summary included. However, they did list 11 major works on the birds of "Bangladesh, Bhutan, British Indian Ocean Territory [Chagos Archipelago], India, Maldives, Myanmar [Burma], Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka (1996, ANNOTATED CHECKLIST, p.11-13), some of which also carry historical resumes of each country's Ornithology.

As I had stressed in my last Letter (# 21, *Pitta* 93, January 1999), our sub-continent is too large a geographical area and, being located in the tropics and subtropics, carries a much more abundant biodiversity (than in the better known temperate regions) to be satisfactorily researched as *one single unit*. Dr Thomas Caverhill Jerdon, who I believe was our most accomplished early naturalist, realised this (see p. xxxix & footnote in Vol. 1 of THE BIRDS OF INDIA, 1862) and hence decided to exclude the birds of the biogeographical areas I indicated on my map (*Pitta*, 93: 4) as the "Assam—Burma area", besides Ceylon and the other islands. Jerdon's pioneering volumes (two, bound in 3 parts, and published privately by him at Calcuta) on our avifauna were beautifully written, packed with data that made interesting reading about a masterly summary and analysis of Indian Ornithology (1016 species treated in 1411 pages). G.M. Henry's (1958, A GUIDE TO THE BIRDS OF CEYLON) book is, similarly, great reading and for me is very *special*. I was a boy of 9 when M. Krishnan's gift of this book (with wonderful colour plates and pen-and-ink sketches) to my father, on 8th November 1955, became a 'fatal attraction' and launched me into a lifetime of passion with Natural History.

The table below presents the latest numerical tally of our bird diversity. The last such data were included by Ripley (1961) in the OLD SYNOPSIS, which was a landmark publication, that had then updated Baker's NEW FAUNA and continued with the emphasis on trinomial (subspecies) nomenclature. My next Letter will discuss, in synoptic detail, this biodiversity (20 bird Orders) and also the species (283) and genera (16) *endemic* to our sub-continent. My UPDATED CHECKLIST will hopefully serve bird watchers as usefully as did Ripley's OLD SYNOPSIS, from the 1960s onwards. But, it also expects to re-introduce the species as the most biologically relevant and significant taxon, bird watchers please take note.

THE CLASS *AVES* IN THE INDIAN REGION

Gaviiformes	**1 (0)**	**2 (0)**
Podicipediformes	**2 (0)**	**5 (0)**
Procellariiformes	**10 (0)**	**15 (0)**
Pelecaniformes	**6 (0)**	**17 (1)**
Ciconiiformes	**22 (0)**	**35 (2)**
Anseriformes	**19 (1)**	**42 (1)**
Falconiformes	**25 (0)**	**77 (7) (10)**
Galliformes	**25 (4)**	**50 (24) (25)**
Gruiformes	**19 (1)**	**33 (4)**
Charadriiformes	**41 (0)**	**116 (5)**
Columbiformes	**9 (0)**	**41 (7)**
Psittaciformes	**2 (0)**	**15 (7)**
Cuculiformes	**9 (0)**	**24 (7)**
Strigiformes	**13 (1)**	**34 (8)**
Caprimulgiformes	**3 (0)**	**11 (3)**
Apodiformes	**7 (0)**	**17 (3)**
Trogoniformes	**1 (0)**	**3 (1)**
Coraciiformes	**16 (1)**	**33 (5)**
Piciformes	**16 (0)**	**50 (18)**
[Non-Passeriformes]	***246 (8)***	***620 (~~103~~) (107)***
Passeriformes	**189 (8)**	**762 (180)**

TOTALS = 20 Orders, 435 Genera (16 endemic), 1,382 Species (~~283~~ 287 endemic)

[**Addenda Letter # 21** -- Last line of Para 1 on Page 4 should follow with "See also my Letter # 2, *Pitta* 67 & 68, November & December, 1996"]

Dr Kumar Ghorpadé, P.O. Box 8439, Bangalore 560 084 & e-mail: varanus.kg@mailcity.com

REVIEW

Indian Journal of Biodiversity
Volume 1, Number 1+2 (January-December 1997), 204 pages
Edited & Published by Dr Kumar Ghorpadé

There is a new journal doing the rounds - its aim is to "bring back to readers the fun and excitement of Natural History studies". The *Indian Journal of Biodiversity* is edited and published by Dr Kumar Ghorpadé, with the advice of an "international panel of specialist consultants". Dr Ghorpadé is, of course, well known to readers of the *Pitta* as the author of the series "Letter from an insect-hunting ornithologist", but some may also be familiar with the two other journals he edits and publishes *Humea, Field Ornithology*, and *Colemania, Insect Biosystematics*. The first volume of the *Indian Journal of Biodiversity* (numbers 1 & 2 combined, 1997) consists of 203 pages of papers, notes, letters, and reprints of previously published material. Birds are represented by one research paper and two notes; there are, in addition, articles on insects, plants and Biogeography. The ornithological paper is interesting. It is about how bird diversity in and around the Chikmagalur (Karnataka) area of the Western Ghats is sustained by traditional methods of coffee, cardamom and paddy cultivation. The two notes describe casual observations on birds. Dr Ghorpadé has performed his job as editor remarkably well, and his very informative footnotes are scattered among the pages of this journal.

My main criticism of this first volume is that its target audience is unclear. On one end of the spectrum, there are papers that will be of use only to professional biologists, and on the other is the note by Anthony (Pp. 172-174) on a day of birding in Hyderabad, which seems to belong rather in the *Newsletter for Birdwatchers*. Perhaps the focus will become clearer in subsequent issues. Hopefully Dr Ghorpadé will also find help from a larger number of contributors in his quest to fill the pages of this journal—this first volume is largely written by him. Perhaps a lack of material was the reason for the inclusion of his own startling Letter ("On our butterflies and their 'friends'" pp. 175-176) criticizing an appeal by a group called Friends of Butterflies (*Hornbill* 1996, No. 1) to regulate commercial trapping of butterflies. Apart from (in my opinion) misreading the appeal, Dr Ghorpadé's use of phrases like "pathetic naivete" and "exhibiting (their) ignorance and subjective feelings so blatantly in print" shows that he is not above the "pitiful mud-slinging" that he himself deplores.

Finally, a year's subscription to the journal costs Rs. 250 (for an Indian individual) - this sum will not be excessive to those readers of the *Pitta* who enjoy delving into articles of widely varying scientific content. The rest of us will have to wait and see what this little journal with large potential develops into.

—*Suhel Quader*

BIRDING NOTES *Compiled by Aasheesh Pittie*

This column publishes birding notes in brief telegraphic form, from **Andhra Pradesh, Goa, Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra & Tamil Nadu** on interesting and significant sightings and behaviour like breeding, feeding, migration, nesting, etc. Notes on flowering and fruiting trees and their relationship with birds are also welcome. English names and classification follow, S.D. Ripley's *A Synopsis of the Birds of India and Pakistan* (1982, 2nd ed.) and scientific nomenclature, T. Inskipp, N. Lindsey & W. Duckworth's *An Annotated Checklist of the Birds of the Oriental Region* (1996). Unless specified, all observations are for 1999. Abbreviations, Contributors, Notes, Regional Referees, *etc.*, are at the end. For selection of breeding criteria 'Probable, Possible, Confirmed', see *Pitta* # 82, February 1998, p. 4.

ANDHRA PRADESH

ADILABAD DISTRICT
Chennur Tank, Pranahita Wildlife Sanctuary 16.12.1998 (CS, VR)
SPOTBILL DUCK 17; TUFTED DUCK 26; COOT 28.
Kadam Canal (Near Kawal Wildlife Sanctuary) 20.12.1998
WHITENECKED STORK 2; BRAHMINY DUCK 2; PHEASANT-TAILED JACANA 1 M.
Kawal Wildlife Sanctuary 21.12.1998
RED JUNGLEFOWL 1 pair; GREY JUNGLE FOWL 1M; VERDITER FLYCATCHER 2 M;
Lingapur (Near Kawal Wildlife Sanctuary) 18.12.1998
BLACKBIRD 1.

HYDERABAD DISTRICT 13.12.1998 (HT, KCR)
LESSER WHISTLING TEAL CB., 2 ad., 3 yng; SPOTBILL DUCK CB, 1 yng; CRESTED HAWK-EAGLE 1; INDIAN MOORHEN CB, 1 ad., 1 yng; LESSER GREY DRONGO 1; GREY WAGTAIL; WHITE WAGTAIL.

KARIMNAGAR DISTRICT 17.12.1998 (CS, VR)
Adavisomanpalli
OPENBILL STORK 6; BLACK IBIS 3; BOOTED HAWK-EAGLE 1; MONTAGU'S HARRIER 1; KESTREL 1.
Godavari Khani
GRIFFON VULTURE 1, LONGBILLED VULTURE 18, WHITE-BACKED VULTURE 32, EGYPTIAN VULTURE 2.
Koyyuru
OPENBILL STORK 2; STARLING 80-90.

KRISHNA DISTRICT (AP, SAT, MSK, SU, SJ)
Attapaka, Kaikaluru 24.1
LITTLE CORMORANT PRB, with N-matl; LESSER WHISTLING TEAL *c.* 25,000; DUCK sp., *c.* 20,000.
Allapadu-Allapadurevu Road 24.1
LITTLE CORMORANT 500+; GLOSSY IBIS 800+; LARGE WHISTLING TEAL 4; BROWN CRAKE 1; PIED MYNA; JUNGLE MYNA.
Devuragopuram & Kolleru Lake [through Pandikodu canal] 25.1
EGRET sp? 8,000+; CHESTNUT BITTERN 1; YELLOW BITTERN 4; BITTERN 1; OPENBILL STORK 4,000+; GLOSSY IBIS 500; LARGE WHISTLING TEAL 2; WHITE-EYED BUZZARD EAGLE 2; BLUEBREASTED BANDED RAIL 1; TERN sp? 4,000+; PIED CRESTED CUCKOO 1; GREYHEADED MYNA.

MEDAK DISTRICT
Komatpally Tank, Pocharam Wildlife Sanctuary 15.12.1998 (CS, VR)

PIED CRESTED CUCKOO 2; YELLOWFRONTED PIED WOODPECKER 1; RUFOUSBELLIED BABBLER 6; WHITE WAGTAIL *Motacilla alba leucopsis* 4.

WARANGAL DISTRICT 19.1 (AP, MSK)
Katakshapur Cheruvu
COMMON POCHARD 100; TUFTED POCHARD 300;
Nirukula Cheruvu
TUFTED POCHARD 40; PIED MYNA 2.

KARNATAKA

BANGALORE DISTRICT
Bannerghatta National Park 22.11.1998 (MS, SK)
BRAHMINY KITE PRB 1 N under const.; SPOTTED MUNIA PRB, carrying N-matl.
Hennagara 3.1 (JNP, AVS, SB)
PALLID HARRIER 1.
Jigani Tank 3.1 (LV, DR, JNP, NRS, VS, UR)
LITTLE GREBE CB, 1 pair with 2 yng.; DARTER 1 overhead; COOT CB, 2 pairs with 2 yng, 1 N with 1 yng; PHEASANT-TAILED JACANA 2; SMALL BLUE KINGFISHER PRB excavating N-hole;

MANDYA DISTRICT
Maddur Tank 10.1 (SS, JNP, LS, MBK)
GREY PELICAN 2 OH; CRESTED SERPENT EAGLE 1 overhead; BLACK DRONGO trying unsuccessfully to catch a Great Eggfly *Hypolimnas bolina*. LARGE PIED WAGTAIL PRB, 1 pair with N-matl.
Tailur Tank 10.1 (SS, YRS)
COOT 1 pair with 2 yng (ER, JNP); GREENSHANK 1 rescued from a noose trap and released.

MYSORE DISTRICT 3.12.1998 (PAU)
Mysore City
REDHEADED MERLIN 1 (note; included here as they are becoming rather rare in South Karnataka.)

RAICHUR DISTRICT 3.1 (AP)
Kishkinda Dam, Gangawati
JUNGLE BUSH QUAIL; PAINTED SPURFOWL 2; BROWN CRAKE 2; SMALL GREENBILLED MALKOHA 2 feeding on caterpillar off a eucalyptus; YELLOWTHROATED BULBUL 4; JUNGLE BABBLER CB, 1 ad., feeding yng; COLLARED SAND MARTIN 1; BLACKHEADED & REDHEADED BUNTING large flocks of former and a few latter, feeding in harvested paddy fields.

MAHARASHTRA

AHMEDNAGAR DISTRICT
Kapurwadi Reservoir 30.12.1998 (SMK)
DABCHICK 200+; PAINTED STORK 1; SPOONBILL 10; FLAMINGO 11; BRAHMINY DUCK 2; PINTAIL 100+; SHOVELLER 1; COMMON POCHARD 50+.

NASHIK DISTRICT all 1998 (BH, SG, SR, DU)
Gangapur Dam
LITTLE CORMORANT 20.12: 270; PAINTED STORK 28.11: 22; BRAHMINY DUCK 12.11: 5; GARGANEY 5.11: *c.* 3,000; COMMON POCHARD 5.11: 385. 20.12: 1,500; BLACKEARED KITE 14.11: 28. 28.12: 62 pre-roosting (?) on 200'x100' plot of grassland; RAIN QUAIL 20.12: CB, 2ad., 4 yng; BLACKTAILED GODWIT 20.12: 4; BLACKHEADED GULL 12.11: 62; PIED CRESTED CUCKOO 14.11: 2; (1) WRYNECK 20.12; SYKES' CRESTED LARK 20.12: 59; COMMON SWALLOW 20.12: 25; 1; BROWN SHRIKE 14.11: 2; LESSER WHITETHROAT 20.11; BAYA 14.11: 14 non-br., plm. 20.12: 200+; BLACKHEADED BUNTING 20.11: 26; REDHEADED BUNTING 20.11: 12; GREYNECKED BUNTING 5.11: 18; BUNTINGS (Blackheaded & Redheaded) 20.12: 400 feeding on seeds of *Cymbopogon martini* grass.
Kambala Tank (20km from Nashik on Trimbak Road) 12.11
DABCHICK CB, 4 ad., 2 yng; WHITENECKED STORK 5; LESSER WHISTLING TEAL CB, 22 ad., 10 yng (in reed bed); GARGANEY 5; COTTON TEAL 8; WHITEBACKED VULTURE 2; MARSH HARRIER 2; COOT CB, 25 ad., 4 yng.
Ozar (H.A.L. Factory) 6.11.1998
GREAT INDIAN BUSTARD CB, 5 ad., 1 yng; LESSER FLORICAN 2 (sitting on edge of runway!).
Pandavleni Hill
LONGBILLED VULTURE 14.11: 4; REDBREASTED FLYCATCHER 14.11: 2; TICKELL'S LEAF WARBLER 14.11: 6; BLUE ROCK THRUSH 14.11: 1 pair; CRESTED BUNTING 14.11: 2.
Rantalai Lake (20km north of Nashik on Satpura-Nashik road) 18.12
DABCHICK CB, 12 ad., 6 yng; PINTAIL 24; COMMON TEAL 18; GARGANEY 60; SHOVELLER 12; COMMON POCHARD 150; MARSH HARRIER 1; BROWN CRAKE 1; COOT 100. CB, 2 ad., 3 yng; CHIFFCHAFF 2; BLUETHROAT 1M, 1F.
Vihloli Lake (14km from Nashik on Mumbai-Nashik highway) 14.12
WHITENECKED STORK 3; BLACK IBIS 2; BRAHMINY DUCK 32; GARGANEY 6; MARSH HARRIER 2; PINTAIL SNIPE 3.

RATNAGIRI DISTRICT
Guhagar Town 8.1 (LD'S)
GREEN PIGEON 4; GREYHEADED MYNA 6; JUNGLE MYNA.

ABBREVIATIONS: Ab-abundant; ad-adult/s; br-breeding; C-common/ly; CB-confirmed breeding; const-construction/ing; *c.*-approximately; disp-display/ing; F-female; flt-flight; fly-family; freq-frequent/ly; hrd-heard; id-identify/ied; imm-immature; inc-include/ing; Is-Island; juv-juvenile; LM-local migrant; M-male; mat-material; N-nest/ing/s; POB-possible breeding; PRB-probable breeding; plm-plumage; RF-Reserve Forest; Resp-respectively; Tlk-Taluk; vil-village; WL-wildlife; yng-young.

CONTRIBUTORS: A Pittie (AP); AV Srivatsa (AVS); B Raha (BR); C Srinivasulu (CS); D Ramaiah (DR); D Ugaonkar (DU); E Ratnavalli (ER); JN Prasad (JNP); L Shyamal (LS); L Vaidyanathan (LV); L D'Souza (LD'S); M Soumya (MS); MB Krishna (MBK); MS Kulkarni (MSK); NR Swamy (NRS); PA Ullas (PAU); S Balachandran (SB); S Gudsoorkar (SG); S Jaltare (SJ), S Karthikeyan (SK); SM Kurhade (SMK); S Ranade (SR); S Subramanya (SS); S Ulla (SU); SA Taher (SAT); U Ramaiah (UR); V Rao (VR); V Sanjay (VS); YR Siddarth (YRS);
REGIONAL REFEREES: Andhra Pradesh: A Pittie; Goa: H Lainer; Karnataka: JN Prasad; Kerala: PO Nameer; Maharashtra: N Jamdar; Tamil Nadu: V Santharam.

For Private Circulation Only

For more information write to: Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh, PO Box 45, Banjara Hills PO, Hyderabad 500034, India.
Editors: Aasheesh Pittie (3350683) & Siraj A Taher (3352607) **E-mail**: AASHEESH@HD1.VSNL.NET.IN
Membership (Rs): Admission=20; Ordinary=100, Student=25 per annum; Life=1,000. *Outstation cheques not accepted.*

Published 8/3/99

PITTA

Bulletin of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh **No. 95 : March 1999**

PROGRAMME

Indexed 14/2/2001

FIELD OUTING: 21-3-1999: Manjira Barrage, Medak district: Members are requested to assemble near Shanbhag Hotel, Panjagutta, by 7.30am. One forest dept vehicle will be arranged. Please book your seats as soon as possible. This will be a full-day trip. Those proceeding directly should meet us at the Environment Education Centre at Manjira.

INDOOR MEETING: 15-3-1999, 6 p.m.: Talk and slide show on Kolleru by Siraj A Taher and Aasheesh Pittie, and discussion on the BSAP project. Vidyaranya High School, Opp., Secretariat, Saifabad, Hyderabad 500004.

EDITORIAL: Society Matters & Announcements

It is a couple of weeks since ***Mayura*** (vol. 12) was posted and I am sure that all of you would have received copies by now. A separate Index was enclosed, as the one bound with the volume was incomplete. Plans are afoot to produce two more volumes (13 and 14) this year. One will be a special issue on the Asian Waterfowl Census in Andhra Pradesh.

Members will be pleased to note that henceforth articles, papers, short-notes, etc., for *Mayura*, will not be restricted to Andhra Pradesh. We will publish material on Indian ornithology. Contributions for publication could range from scientific papers, short notes, checklists, etc., to write-ups on visits to sanctuaries, unprotected areas or fascinating observations near your house. Reviews of books on or related to Indian ornithology may also be sent. Sketches of birds and/or their habitats are welcome! Kindly spread the word and send your material to the address at the end of this bulletin. We are interested in your experiences with birds!

We would like to take this opportunity and remind you that some of your **memberships fall due on 1-4-1999**. You will be able to ascertain this from the address label on your envelopes. If the last line reads "31-3-1999", a renewal is due! We urge Ordinary Members to become Life Members of the Society. This helps in increasing the corpus fund of the Society and reduces postage and stationery costs on renewal reminders. It also saves paper! A Membership Renewal Form is enclosed for your use. You could do a further good turn to the Society by introducing at least one friend to bird-watching by making him/her a member—a membership form is enclosed. This simple act will double the membership of BSAP which stands at 114 Ordinary, 130 Life, 26 Student and 2 Corporate Member/s as on 22-2-1999. Let us aim for a modest membership of 500 for this year.

A colourful round sticker (4½" diameter, back adhesive) has been produced by the Society, depicting the Indian Pitta with the words "Protect wild birds" on top and "Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh" at the bottom. The artwork is by Sachin Jaltare. The stickers are for sale at the following rates. Members are urged to purchase and popularize the stickers by gifting them to children (for distribution in classrooms!), friends, colleagues, *etc*. Send your orders to the Hon. Secretary (address at end of this Bulletin).

Number of Stickers	Rate in Rupees	Postage in Rupees	Total Rupees
Two	5.00	3.00	8.00
Twenty	50.00	9.00	59.00
Forty	100.00	18.00	118.00

NOTES & NEWS

Field Trips to Pocharam & ICRISAT

J.V.D. Moorty

Going bird-watching to **Pocharam**, 15km from **Medak** is always something to look forward to. To reach early enough to catch the early bird is another matter altogether and the best we—our family—could do was to reach the forest office at 9.30am. Seeing the others hadn't arrived as yet we proceeded to the circuit house perched atop a hillock offering a magnificent view of the water body and the surrounding areas.

The water from Pocharam flows into Nizam Sagar and this time the lake was more than full up. Our first sighting of waterbirds was a flock of Barheaded Geese *Anser indicus* honking their ways across the sky. I counted 30, a figure corroborated later by Ron Grasser who saw them in the water; sandwiches and tea were given priority before going down to the shores.

Ron and his wife Sue joined us at the Inspection Bungalow perched on the shores. Owing to the large volume of water there was hardly any avian activity on the water. Our disappointment was wiped away by a couple of River Terns *Sterna aurantia* that came teasingly close before making an abrupt U-turn. There was, of course, the usual waterside activity of the swallows, the Redrumped *Hirundo daurica*, and the Wiretailed *H. smithii*. Palm Swifts *Cypsiurus parvus* and House Swifts *Apus affinis* added to the flying melee. While engrossed with these we had four Black Ibis *Pseudibis papillosa* flying past overhead. The blue above had more activity than the blue below. A Pied Kingfisher *Ceryle rudis* came along to try out his angling skills, but went away unrewarded after making three tries in as many minutes. A lone Brahminy Kite *Haliastur indus* glided into view and high above one Longbilled Vulture *Gyps indicus* and a couple of Whitebacked Vultures *G. benghalensis* wheeled their way across the skies. The day was getting warmer.

Just when we had given up on the others a party of five led by Rajeev Mathew joined us. His team had spotted a largish flock of

Small Indian Pratincoles *Glareola lactea* and some 20 Blackbellied Terns *Sterna acuticauda* on a sand bar in the water, a fact that set Ron and me off on a 'cross-country trek' to see them. We did—after scaring a hare from under a bush. We repaired back to the Inspection Bungalow and in between bites of sandwiches wandered over for another look at the lake.

All too suddenly there was a flurry of activity in the vegetation in front of us. A female Blackheaded Cuckoo-Shrike *Coracina melanoptera* was busy hunting insects amongst the branches of a tree above us, and was accompanied by a Common Wood-Shrike *Tephrodornis pondicerianus*. Disturbed by this company a Lesser Goldenbacked Woodpecker *Dinopium benghalense* cackled its way to look for juicier morsels elsewhere. A Crimsonbreasted Barbet *Megalaima haemacephala* started his monotonous smithy job, and a Golden Oriole *Oriolus oriolus* cut a gleaming path between two trees.

Shefali, my daughter, was thrilled with a tête-à-tête with a Common Mongoose *Herpestes edwardsi*, who after having a long look at the observers beat an unhurried and dignified retreat into the undergrowth. Walking back across the bund to our car, Surabhi spotted a flock of 8 Red Munias *Estrilda amandava* flitting amongst the bushes, while I was attracted by the announcement of a Whitebrowed Bulbul *Pycnonotus luteolus*. What I found singular about its behaviour was that it was pulling at the petals of the *Besharam* flowers [*Ipoemia* sp.] very systematically and appeared to be feeding on them! A Grey Partridge *Francolinus pondicerianus* bid us farewell. At the forest rest house, with its Blackbuck *Antilope cervicapra* enclosure, we stopped to exchange notes. The forest staff said that the return migration in March would be worth a visit again.

A must-see is the Medak church for those who haven't. It's just 500 yards off the main highway. Unfortunately, there weren't many bird watchers on this trip—was it the distance or other things that kept them away? Pocharam is a lovely place, and well worth the distance and the time.

Twenty seven kilometers north-west of Hyderabad, on the Mumbai highway, with a secure and fenced-in area of more than 3,000 acres lies ICRISAT, one of the most popular birding sites in Hyderabad—if the 40+ members showing up, after the poor turnout at Pocharam were to be taken as an indicator. What's more, almost all the members reached the venue punctually! The ICRISAT bus was waiting for us at the main gate. After identifying ourselves at the gate, we boarded the bus to be taken round the campus. A Grey Partridge *Francolinus pondicerianus* announced our departure to no one in particular.

First stop was the Campus Lake. This lake is fed directly by the Manjira waters and never dries up. We feasted our eyes on Purple Moorhens *Porphyrio porphyrio* dotting the shores pecking away in the grass, on Garganey *Anas querquedula* lazing indolently, and on Spotbilled Ducks *Anas poecilorhyncha* swimming about in an aimless sort of way. A Little Grebe *Podiceps ruficollis* kept ducking in and out of the water. A flock of Large Cormorants *Phalacrocorax carbo* winged their way rapidly across the lake; we were spotted by a flock of about 35 Lesser Whistling Teals *Dendrocygna javanica* which made an about turn to look for less ogled areas. An immature Bronzewinged Jacana *Metopidius indicus* delicately lily-trotted its way into the reeds along the shore on the near side; Redwattled Lapwings *Vanellus indicus* kept asking us 'did-you-do-it'. Down the road, in the distance, a Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus* was systematically quartering the ground. The arrival of a Brahminy Kite *Haliastur indicus* had all glasses focussed upwards where a couple of Grey Herons *Ardea cinerea* beat time leisurely with their wings. A wire-load of Common Swallows *Hirundo rustica* connected two electric poles to each other.

We then drove to Patancheru Lake on the northwestern perimeter. Outside the fence are paddy fields adjoining the lake—a sea of green covered with white—Egrets, Cattle *Bubulcus ibis* and Little *Egretta garzetta*, doing their bit for themselves and the farmer! The lake has a factory on the far side and is bounded by reeds on two sides. In the distance, standing quietly, were Openbilled Storks *Anastomus oscitans*, and Coots *Fulica atra* swam around aplenty. In fact, a pair of Coot parents even showed off their 4 fluffy offspring. A Whitebreasted Kingfisher *Halcyon smyrnensis* sat on a branch, head bowed in anticipation of the next meal, while a Pied Kingfisher *Ceryle rudis* favoured the more direct approach. Andrew Routh, a wildlife veterinary surgeon from the U.K. agreed with me in identifying a small bird as an LBJ (Little Brown job, as they are called in England). The others around claimed they hadn't seen it at all! We drove past the perimeter spotting a Short-toed Eagle *Circaetus gallicus* soaring on a thermal it had sought and found. Driving past the cultivation and the cultivated areas we arrived at the ICRISAT Lake which was simply dotted with ducks—Spotbilled Ducks *Anas poecilorhyncha*, Garganey, Pintails *A. acuta*, Shoveller *A. clypeata*, Common Pochards *Aythya ferina*, and in the background of this jamboree, our raptor identifier Rajeev Mathew, spotted a handful of Wigeon *Anas penelope*. Blue-tailed Bee-eaters *Merops phillipinus* watched our activity with interest even as they were making sallies off the wire they were perched upon into the air to catch insects. A Rufoustailed Finch-lark *Ammomanes phoenicurus* joined this pair on the wire. Rose-ringed Parakeets *Psittacula krameri* made their way noisily, as usual, above us. From the ICRISAT Lake to the Red Tank North past the Red tank South, the bus took us past a flock of White Ibis *Threskiornis aethiopica* feeding in the fields. A Paddyfield Pipit *Anthus rufulus* watched apprehensively. A halt at the Red tank North is a very fulfilling experience for the eyes, for the birds appear to be close, and those with photographic inclinations immediately began stalking a Purple Moorhen in the reeds. A flock of Brahminy Ducks *Tadorna ferruginea* swimming meditatively decided to increase the distance to more decent proportions. On the Middle Island were Comb Ducks (Nuktas) *Sarkidiornis melanotos* enjoying their noon shut-eye. A little further up, about ten or so palm trees are residences to a breeding colony of about 75+ Grey herons. A flock of black Ibis *Pseudibis papillosa* gave us an aerial look down and a lone Whitenecked Stork *Ciconia episcopus* searched the water for its meal. A pair of Wood Sandpipers *Tringa glareola* scurried about busily on the far shore. A largish bird of prey on a pylon held the attention of the spotting scopes and it was ultimately Rajeev who pinpointed it as a Steppe Eagle *Aquila nipalensis*. The eyes having feasted long enough it was time for us to fill our breadbaskets at the cafeteria. After a sumptuous lunch we headed for the lawns for a talk by Andrew Routh, who spoke of his experiences as a vet and recounted his dealing with sea birds hit by oil slicks. He also spoke on how to deal with sick and injured birds—a talk laced with humour, it was very interesting and informative to all but the children, who could at last unwind and had a gala time on the lawns. And a lone bird-watcher, who, even while Andrew was speaking, changed gears audibly in his snoring before settling down into top gear—a fact which kept everyone in splits. He woke up just as Andrew finished!

ICRISAT is an excellent place to watch birds because of its varied habitat and also because it offers protection to the birds. It is a unique area to be preserved and conserved.

...Continued on page 4

LETTER FROM AN INSECT-HUNTING ORNITHOLOGIST—23

"The area delimited by this volume, including Pakistan, India, Nepal, SE. Tibet, Ceylon and neighbouring islands, covers some 1200 species [1,203 spp.—KG]. In all there appear to be 2061 forms including species and subspecies, of which the occurrence or identification of 16 is questionable. About 1750 of these forms are resident, the rest being migrants. The majority of migrants are those in the traditional sense, birds which include this area in their non-breeding range. In addition, there are occasional wanderers, vagrants, or rare strays which may have been recorded no more than once, far out of their normal migratory pattern. Besides, there are the pelagic families such as the shearwaters or petrels, species found only at sea, whose occurrence in the coastal waters of these countries may be unusual or sporadic. Baker (1930, FAUNA 7: v) recorded 2346 species and subspecies from the area covered by his volumes, which, of course, included Burma, not dealt with here.

"For those interested in the statistics of taxonomic treatment of birds, it is worthwhile to record that Baker in his last two volumes of the FAUNA (1930, 7, 8) included the birds of the region treated by me hereafter in 573 genera. In the following pages the birds listed are included in 402 genera [actually 400 only—KG], a reduction of 30 per cent, the direct result of the mass of literature on classification and revisionary studies of the thirty years that have elapsed between the publication of these volumes.

"It is interesting to note that of the above listed 176 species [and 11 genera—KG] endemic to the Indian subregion or its immediate environs (one or two species reach Afghanistan or Burma), the following affinities appear . . . . . There is . . . . no statistical difference between the number of endemic species estimated to be derived from the Palaearctic and those from the Ethiopian [30 spp., 17 % each—KG] regions . . . . . It is noteworthy in this regard that three of the endemic Indian genera are Palaearctic in origin and are found in the Himalayas . . . . . The remaining endemic genera in the Indian subregion consist of one Ethiopian [now called Afrotropical—KG] . . . . . and 4 of Indochinese affinity [also 109 spp., 62 %, from latter region—KG]."

[S.D. Ripley, 1961, OLD SYNOPSIS, pp. xvii-xviii, xxiii]

Last month, the B.N.H.S.' Table Calendar for 1999 carried a painting, by E. Neale, of the beautiful Cheer Pheasant, *Catreus wallichii* Hardwicke (# 307) a Western Himalayan endemic species belonging to a monotypic genus which is also autochthonous (= indigenous) to our sub-continent. This would be a great opportunity for me to demonstrate "What's in a name?", how a scientific name and that of its author(s) enables information retrieval about an animal or a plant that was 'christened' with a Linnean name and introduced to Science and the scientific community. Thomas Hardwicke (1757-1835), a soldier, who was the first European to collect in the Western Himalaya (which were then unexplored) in the last decade of the 18th Century, was chiefly a zoologist, but also an active botanist. He described and named the Cheer Pheasant as "*Lophophorus Wallichii*", in the *Transactions of the Linnean Society*, London (15: 166) published in February 1827, for specimen(s) sent him by Wallich (?) collected in "Almorah", now a picturesque minor hill station 1650 metres high in eastern Garhwal, which territory was taken from Nepal following the 1815 Gurkha War. Hardwicke named the pheasant after Nathaniel Wallich (1786-1854), a Danish surgeon, who "was a competent, indeed excellent, taxonomist of the Linnean School" trained by Martin Vahl, professor at Copenhagen (see I.H. Burkill's Chapters on the History of Botany in India, *J.B.N.H.S.*, Vols 51-60, 1953-1963) and who botanized in Nepal and perhaps acquired the material of the Cheer Pheasant for Hardwicke to describe. Wallich's 3-volume *Plantae Asiaticae Rariores* (1829-1832, London) is an early documentation of our Flora. These men, a soldier and a surgeon, trained also in Natural History, were pioneering field biologists here who explored and discovered the animal and plant wealth of the Indian sub-continent. These professions have been noble ones which sent their practitioners to our land to document its biodiversity -- Col. Sykes and Dr Jerdon would be familiar to our bird watchers (see my Letter 21 in *Pitta* # 93) and Burkill also wrote (J.B.N.H.S., 58: 682; 1962) that "**Thomas Caverhill Jerdon** (1811-1872), who made his reputation as a zoologist but also collected plants . . . .". Where *are* such naturalists today? There were earlier ornithologists who did as much or more work than Sálim Ali, you know! I would become a 'racist' if I was prejudiced against the firangees or what the Mohammedans call *kaafirs* -- I look at these Europeans or other "White Men" (they are also Caucasoid, like us, by the way!) simply as human beings who helped us find out, scientifically, what we have in our sub-continent. The European discovery of the Indian Flora by R. Desmond (1992, 368 pp., 32 pls, figs, Oxford University Press) will 'educate' you about what you don't know (or want to know?!) and one waits for a similar historical compilation about the discovery of our Fauna.

This example of the Cheer Pheasant (listed as "threatened" in the ANNOTATED CHECKLIST, p. 25) I will also use to highlight a couple of other points that merit the attention of serious bird watchers. Ripley's NEW SYNOPSIS (1982, p. 87) gives its status and distribution as -- "*Resident*. The Himalayas from Hazara east to west-central Nepal (Pokhara) between *c.* 1500 and 2700 m. Affects open conifer or deciduous forest interspersed with steep grassy slopes." Its range is ample corroboration of the limits of the Western Himalaya biogeographical sub-area I indicated on the Map in *Pitta* (# 93, p. 4). As a Himalayan endemic it, and most other pheasants (including the similar Ring-necked -- not "Common" please! -- *Phasianus colchicus*, native to China and nearby areas which was introduced into Europe and North America, for hunting), are recently evolved bird species which 'mutated' to occupy the new niches opening up, consequent to the elevation of these South Asian mountains that the northward thrust of Dravidia 'provoked'. A glance at Plate 35 of the PICTORIAL GUIDE (figs 2, 3 & 7) shows how similar these three long-tailed pheasants look. I refer also to Hume's Pheasant, *Syrmaticus humiae* Hume, described first from Manipur, and which is also now considered 'threatened'. But, 'modern' taxonomy places them in 3 different genera, based on characters a systematic entomologist like me would consider trivial. This is to remind ourselves that "the genus in Ornithology has lost its importance as a vehicle which groups species for ease of identification and information retrieval" (*teste* F.C. Thompson, see *Pitta* # 81, p. 4). And, if man can introduce a Chinese pheasant into Europe and North America and make it "common" there (even if hunted by true sportsmen-*shikaris*!), why cannot we breed the Cheer and Hume's pheasants in captivity here and prevent them from remaining "threatened"? Stuart Baker (NEW FAUNA, 5: 309) wrote that the Cheer is "excellent for the table" and I look forward to the day when these pheasants could also be hunted for sport and eating, to control their growing populations, enhanced, I hope, by future captive breeding and release into their native habitats! Like Nepal allows *shikar* for foreign exchange, where rich hunters shoot carefully selected and regulated big and small game in Hunting Preserves in that Himalayan Kingdom, a bigger and better endowed country like ours should be able to offer more exciting 'outdoor sport' to foreign (and native) tourists. It is time we stopped chanting the mantra of 'Conservation' only, when it is Restoration that will really help the wildlife we want to 'save'. A positive attitude is needed rather than the negative one of

'locking up' our threatened animals and plants in the 'jails' we legislate and designate as 'Protected Areas', akin to the terribly managed zoos (ugh!) we operate in our country. Time to think hard and change folks!

In my last Letter (# 22, *Pitta* 94) I had promised to "discuss, in synoptic detail, this biodiversity" of ours. The Cheer is again suitable for me to begin this analysis of the 20 Orders, 435 Genera (16 endemic) and 1,382 species (287 endemic—not 283) of birds that have been documented from our sub-continent. Precisely because the Order Galliformes, which includes our Megapode, Partridges, Quails, and Pheasants (which the Peafowl and Junglefowl also are!), contains the highest percentage (50%) of endemic species restricted in distribution to our biogeographic sub-region. These 50 species belong to 25 genera of which 4 (*Perdicula* Hodgson -- Bush Quails, *Galloperdix* Blyth -- Spurfowls, *Ophrysia* Bonaparte -- Pygmy Partridge, not 'Quail', and, of course, *Catreus* Cabanis -- Cheer Pheasant) are endemic here. These 4 indigenous genera contribute 9 of the 25 endemic species of this Order found only in our sub-continent. I wish to bring to notice here, that endemism and rarity do not, repeat not, go 'hand-in hand'. Our Indian Peafowl (*Pavo cristatus*), Grey Junglefowl (*Gallus sonneratii*), all the 3 Spurfowl, White-crested and Kaleej Pheasants (*Lophura hamiltonii* and *L. leucomelanos*), 3 of the 4 Bush Quails, the Black-breasted Rain Quail (*Coturnix coromandelica*), the Grey and Painted Partridges (*Francolinus pondicerianus* and *F. pictus*), besides the Chukor Partridge (*Alectoris chukar*), are all endemics, but to us bird watchers, who really know the field situation, are "common"! The autochthonous species that are rare and in need of Restoration Ecology 'funda' (not just crying out the 'conservation' mantra, please) are the Swamp Partridge (*Francolinus gularis*), Hume's Bush Quail (*Perdicula manipurensis*), White-cheeked Partridge (*Arborophila atrogularis*), Red-breasted Partridge (*A. mandellii*), the Gray's, Satyr and Blyth's Tragopans (*Tragopan melanocephalus*, *T. satyra*, *T. blythii*), Ceylon Junglefowl (*Gallus lafayetii*), and Hume's Pheasant, as mentioned earlier. The other 25 species of Galliformes are shared with our neighbouring countries or biogeographical areas, which are mainly Trans-Himalayan, but also the Assam--Burma sub-area, and these non-endemics are mostly Indo-Chinese or Indo-Malayan in character, found also in E. & SE Asia.

The Galliformes are treated as a very primitive Order by Sibley & Monroe, based on their DNA-DNA research, and the Megapodes are separated by them into a different Order (Craciformes) close to the Struthioniformes, which include the likes of Ostriches, Cassowaries, Rheas, Emus, *etc.*, and only fossil forms of this most plesiotypic Order have been discovered in our sub-continent. Besides analysing the other bird Orders and their endemics in coming Letters, I will also write about the biogeographic sub-areas of our sub-continent, and their biodiversity.

Letter # 22: Addenda -- Last line of Para 2 on Page 4 should follow with "Henry, like me, was also an insect taxonomist, at the Colombo Museum, his specialty being the 'long-horned' grasshoppers (Orthoptera: Tettigoniidae) that are primarily nocturnal in habit." **Errata** --First line of 2nd Quotation on p. 3 should read "commenced work in", last 2 lines of Para 1 on p. 4 "pp. 11-13" and "résumés"; line 7 of Para 2 on p. 4 "Calcutta", line 8 of same "Ornithology then" and "1955, A GUIDE", line 4 of last Para "species (287)"; parts of Table should read "Falconiformes 25(0) 77(10), Galliformes 25(4) 50(25), *[Non-Passeriformes] 246(8) 620 (107),* and Totals = 20 Orders, 435 Genera (16 endemic), 1,382 species (287 endemic)". •

--- **Dr Kumar Ghorpadé**, P.O. Box 8439, Bangalore 560 084.

... Continued from page 2

Soon after the vulture scarcity alert from Dr Asad Rahmani of Bombay Natural History Society (*Pitta* #92, p. 1), comes another report on the devastating effect of pesticides on top-of-the-food-chain predators—from **Japan**.

"Environmentalists in Japan have found high levels of hormone-disrupting chemicals, including polychlorinated biphenyls (**PCBs**) and Dichloro dimethyltrichloro ethane (**DDT**), in dead **Golden Eagle** chicks and unhatched eggs around the country. Experts say that further tests are needed to find out if these chemicals are responsible for the plummeting breeding rates of the eagle over the past ten years. Some researchers say that recent findings suggest that adult birds, which ingest the chemicals, are passing the compounds on to their offspring.

"Researchers measured the concentration of chemicals found in eight unhatched eggs and five birds who died young. The results show that the eggs contained high levels of PCBs and DDT. PCBs were found in the highest concentrations, ranging from 63 to 210 nanogrammes per gramme (ng/g) in the infants and 14 to 65ng/g in the eggs.

"Although most of the chemicals detected are now banned in most countries, they are slow to decompose and can persist in the environment for a long time." [*Down to Earth* 7(18): 18.]

"When serious bird-watchers race through the forest to identify species, they sometimes get lost. Many have bought a GPS (**global positioning system**) receiver, a handheld gizmo that tells them their location, route, and speed of travel. Some are now taking advantage of a new feature that comes with more advanced GPS models: the 'electronic bread crumb.' It can take latitudinal and longitudinal readings along the way so birders and other outdoor enthusiasts can retrace their steps." [T.K. in *Audubon* 100(6): 25].

Below are two interesting excerpts from the Internet, sent to "Birdchat" on the role of birds as **insectivores**.

"I have one paper...entitled "Food, flocking and territorial behaviour of the **Pied Wagtail** ***Motacilla alba yarrellii*** Gould in winter" by N.B. Davies published in *J. Anim. Ecol.* 45:235-254...probably around 1975 or 1976. He studied this species all day with a variety of techniques. Their diet is almost entirely insects, mostly **Diptera**. Wagtails spent 90% of the day feeding and one prey item was eaten every *4 seconds* throughout the day, on the average. This was during winter.

"Here's what he says in his text: 'The time taken to collect twenty items, as measured by twenty pecks, was timed by stopwatch and from several such sequences recorded each hour the feeding rate throughout the day was determined. The bird always pecked at discrete items and by observing from a few metres range it was established that one peck corresponded to one item eaten, so this method of determining feeding rate is thought to be reliable. From these data the total daily number of items eaten could be calculated and this varied from 4,790-15,160 (mean 7,550, ±1,020). The mean feeding rate throughout the day was 15.4 (±1.8) items per minute. Therefore, one prey item was taken every 4 seconds throughout the day, a figure comparable to that found by...for **tits** (**Paridae**) in winter.'

"My only concern is that pecks and successful food catches may not be a one to one situation, although the author assures us his observations indicate it is...but on the face of it wagtails can take an incredible number of small insects each day...and that's under winter conditions without young to feed. There must be studies of stomach contents of swallows and swifts or food taken tot he nest to feed young...that would provide interesting information..."

[Joel Weintraub]

"While it may be true that **Purple Martins** consume mass

quantities of **mosquitoes**, they are mostly in the stomachs of the **dragonflies** they eat!" [Shirley J. Alt]

"A chill emerged from **Lake Ontario's** waters last July. New York State Department of Environmental Conservation researchers found nearly a thousand **double-crested cormorants** killed by shotgun blasts on **Little Galloo Island**, about five miles from the New York shoreline. 'It was pretty gruesome and disgusting,' says the department's Jim Farquhar.

With 5,800 nests, the island serves as a rookery for cormorants, not endangered but protected by state and federal law. Fishermen and members of surrounding communities had complained that the birds were hurting their livelihood by reducing populations of small-mouth bass and other sport fish. To test the charges, conservation officials are conducting a yearlong study. At least one fisherman was subpoenaed by a grand jury. Rewards as high as $50,000 for heads on the identity of the perpetrators have so far produced no arrests." [John L. Eliot in *National Geographic* 195(2): Earth Almanac. (February 1999)].

"A **hummingbird** picks up more than nectar at a flower in **Costa Ricka**'s **Monteverde Cloud Forest Preserve**. Pinhole-size **mites** live in the blossom. When the plant's last florets bloom, mites wait for a bird's bill to enter, then climb on and sprint to the bird's nostril at cheetah-like speed—12 body lengths per second. The stowaways cling till they smell the familiar perfume of a new host plant, then deplane. Each plant species visited by hummers shelters a different mite. Many organisms share hidden links with others; when a species dwindles, partners and parasites suffer." [Morell, V (1999): The variety of life. *National Geographic* 195(2): 6-31.]

Braving the cyclone that annihilated thousands of their species earlier this June, **Lesser Flamingoes *Phoeniconaias minor*** are now multiplying and have successfully built about 30,000 nesting mounds in the saltpans of **Little Rann of Kutch**. The breeding boom has surprised even conservationists, and raised hopes about the survival of these endangered birds.

Lesser Flamingoes have hitherto been known to breed only in the watery expanses of the **Greater Rann of Kutch (Flamingo City)**, along with the **Greater Flamingoes**. This is considered to be the world's largest flamingo colony.

In recent years, their colonies were seen on the Kutch coastline, at Cherwari near Surajbari bridge. However, this entire colony, along with thousands of birds, eggs, chicks and nesting mounds, was destroyed during the June 9 cyclone, which had hit Kandla port, leaving the naturalists, worried.

Gujarat Environmental Education and Research (GEER) Foundation director H.S. Singh informed The Times of India News Service that the new colony is "about 20km from the Wachchhraj Solanki Bet (Islet), west of Jalandhar Bet, in the Little Rann." Devji Dhamecha of Dhrangadhra Prakruti Mandal, Dhrangadhra (District Surendranagar), which works for the protection of Wild Ass Sanctuary in the Little Rann, also told The Times of India News Service that "Five to seven thousand strong flock of birds were seen in 29 salt-pans, in the sanctuary area, which has been declared a world heritage site. We also saw roughly 35,000 chicks, about 25,000 eggs and nearly 70,000 pairs of birds."

He says the nesting activity of Lesser Flamingoes was seen on a large scale last in 1973 in the Greater Rann, but never here on such a massive scale. "The breeding season of these birds is usually June through July, but here it's been August through September. Previously, ornithologists made notes of two breeding sites in the area, not exceeding 1,000 mounds, in 1993 and 1995."

It was also observed that some of the birds, which probably were in a hurry to lay eggs, had laid them on the bunds of the salt pans.

Describing the Lesser Flamingoes, senior lecturer in the Zoology Department of Gujarat University and ornithologist Rishad Pravez says they are between 90 to 105cm tall, survive on *Artemia salina* - a small shrimp found in the saline desert waters or saltpans. Now, being a resident species of India, they are distributed elsewhere in the country, concentrated near salt lakes, including **Chilika** in **Orissa**, **Sambhar** in **Rajasthan** and **Point Calimere** in **Tamil Nadu**. Their colonies have earlier been reported from the salt lakes of east Africa too.

Mr Pravez, who had seen a maximum of 288 mounds in the Little Rann since 1986, says, "The design of this colony is spectacular. The saltpan bund acts as a wall, preventing chicks from running away. Mounds were in linear or parallel rows. We saw flocks of six thousand and more chicks. Their courtship must have started in early July, followed by nest building. The first report of breeding was received on August 24. The chicks take about 70 days to fly."

Commenting on the shift in the location of the breeding ground, Mr Singh says, "In the '70s, Salim Ali had reported a group nesting here, but this was very small. They prefer wide-spread shallow water up to one feet deep and make their nests up to 40cm high from the mud, so that chicks get enough food right from the mounds. We've seen about 30,000 mounds in an area of 2.5km^2."

Expressing concern about the future of the new colony, Mr Dhamecha says, "If the government ensures that the nesting mounds are not destroyed by the salt industry and they are preserved, the birds will probably return next year and re-use them, this will give them another chance of survival. These birds are very cautious and, hence, if safety is not assured, probably they'll never return." [By Shyam Parekh, *The Times of India*, 14-10-1998]

KC Ramakrishna, the coordinator of the **Habitat Survey Project**, requests all participants to send their data to him as soon as possible. He plans to draw up an interim report so that the status of the project may be known. Coordinators of the various groups are requested to respond at the earliest. He would like to present a report to members at the April indoor meeting.

The 9th **Andhra Pradesh Philatelic Exhibition** (APPEX-99) was held at Hyderabad from 12-15 February 1999. It was an well-organized event, with programmes arranged every day on one aspect of postal system, stamps, or philately. More than 100 philatelists from the state participated in the Competitive Section covering nearly 10 different disciplines with "Thematic" being the largest group. This group had some of the best and most interesting collection of stamps and other philatelic material and the most number of exhibits were on BIRDS! Many countries, concerned with the environment and conservation have realized the importance of the postage stamp and postal material as a means of spreading the message of environmental protection and the richness of nature and wildlife. Toward this end, several countries have published excellent stamps and bird stamps seem to be one of the more popular categories—so a lot of them are available. Thematic (or "Topical") collection is one of the most interesting of all philatelic disciplines as it does not limit one's choice of items, and each collection tells a different story. It is a challenging, exciting and absorbing task, and can be made comprehensive as it involves research, story telling and a unique presentation. For a thematic exhibit, the philatelist must choose a theme and then plan a collection after acquiring as much material as possible. After developing the theme with study and research, the exhibitor must

show his philatelic knowledge in using the appropriate material. The condition and rarity of the material as also originality of the theme, difficulty of the chosen subject, variety of the postal material and the manner of presentation improve the exhibit. At APPEX-99, several bird collections were entered in thematic (seniors category). Two were awarded Vermeil (Gold) of which one was adjudged the best "Thematic Exhibit" and was also awarded the Post Master General's Trophy. Two other exhibits received Silver medals (of which one was Siraj A. Taher's, "Study of birds") and 3 Bronze (of which one was Humayun Taher's, "Birds of prey"). There were some exhibits in the junior's category also on birds, of which two got certificates.

CONTACT NOTES

"**Fairy Bluebirds** are common residents in **Goa**, occurring in all moist deciduous and semi-evergreen forests along the **Western Ghats** and at a few places even at the coast, wherever a spur of the Ghats reaches down to the sea. Usually, they are spread more or less evenly over the shadier and leafier parts of the forest, keeping in groups of 5 to 10 or joining any of the 'mixed hunting parties'. During the SW-monsoon it is frequently *the* most numerous bird species in such forests. Though numbers and density vary to some extent with the seasons, there is no indication that Goa's population of fairy Bluebirds is migratory.

"It is during the cool season, mid-November to mid-March, that this bird congregates in larger flocks, mostly on forest fringes, around grassy clearings and in almost shadeless eucalyptus plantations. This happens only in the morning, between 7hrs and 9hrs, when the temperature drops to 16^0C-18^0C—what Goans call 'freezing cold'. The sole purpose of these gatherings appears to be of the birds sunning themselves though there is a lot of 'socializing' as well. By 9am these extremely noisy flocks of, usually, 40 to 60 individuals break up.

"In the light of these observations, I found the 'flocks of 100+ each' that I encountered in the **Cotigao Wildlife Sanctuary** at the end of December 1998 just remarkable enough to merit a mention in the *Birding Notes* of the *Pitta*." —Heinz Lainer, Anjuna, Goa.

BIRDING NOTES *Compiled by Aasheesh Pittie*

This column publishes birding notes in brief telegraphic form, from **Andhra Pradesh, Goa, Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra & Tamil Nadu** on interesting and significant sightings and behaviour like breeding, feeding, migration, nesting, etc. Notes on flowering and fruiting trees and their relationship with birds are also welcome. English names and classification follow, S.D. Ripley's *A Synopsis of the Birds of India and Pakistan* (1982, 2nd ed.) and scientific nomenclature, T. Inskipp, N. Lindsey & W. Duckworth's *An Annotated Checklist of the Birds of the Oriental Region* (1996). Unless specified, all observations are for 1999. Abbreviations, Contributors, Notes, Regional Referees, *etc.*, are at the end. For selection of breeding criteria 'Probable, Possible, Confirmed', see *Pitta* # 82, February 1998, p. 4.

GOA

NORTH GOA DISTRICT

Arpora 6.1 (HL)

WHITEBELLIED SEA EAGLE 2 CB.

Tiswadi Wetlands

LESSER SPOTTED EAGLE 6.12.1998, 22.1: 1; LESSER ADJUTANT 14.12.1998: 17; GLOSSY IBIS 14.12.1998: 72; WIGEON 10.1: 1M; TUFTED DUCK 10.1: 1F; INDIAN RIVER TERN 10.1: 1; REDHEADED BUNTING 14.12.1998: 1M.

SOUTH GOA DISTRICT

Cotigao Wildlife Sanctuary (HL)

GREAT PIED HORNBILL 9.11.1998, 27.12.1998: 2; WHITERUMPED SPINETAIL 25.12.1998: 1; HAIRCRESTED DRONGO 25.12.1998: 3; FAIRY BLUEBIRD 25.12.1998: flocks of 100+ each@.

ABBREVIATIONS: Ab-abundant; ad-adult/s; br-breeding; C-common/ly; CB-confirmed breeding; const-construction/ing; *c.*-approximately; disp-display/ing; F-female; flt-flight; fly-family; freq-frequent/ly; hrd-heard; id-identify/ied; imm-immature; inc-include/ing; Is-Island; juv-juvenile; LM-local migrant; M-male; mat-material; N-nest/ing/s; POB-possible breeding; PRB-probable breeding; plm-plumage; RF-Reserve Forest; Resp-respectively; Tlk-Taluk; vil-village; WL-wildlife; yng-young.

CONTRIBUTORS: H Lainer (HL).

NOTES: @ See letter from H. Lainer under "Contact Notes" on p. 6.

REGIONAL REFEREES: Andhra Pradesh: A Pittie; Goa: H Lainer; Karnataka: JN Prasad; Kerala: PO Nameer; Maharashtra: N Jamdar; Tamil Nadu: V Santharam.

THE *GARRULAX* CORNER

"You'd be surprised at the number of people who ask me how I can admire a bird that 'eats dead things.' Well, I always look straight at a person like that and ask, 'Tell me, sir—do you eat live things?" [*John Borneman*, a naturalist hired by the National Audubon Society to help save the condor from extinction. (*Audubon* 100(6): 92)]

LITERARY *WREN*DITIONS

"You must have the bird in your heart before you can find it in the bush." *John Burroughs* (1908): Art of Seeing Things (Essay).

For Private Circulation Only

For more information, write to: Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh, PO Box 45, Banjara Hills PO, Hyderabad 500034, India.
Editors: Aasheesh Pittie (3350683) & Siraj A Taher (3352607) **E-mail**: AASHEESH@HD1.VSNL.NET.IN
Membership (Rs): Admission=20; Ordinary=100, Student=25 per annum; Life=1,000. ***Outstation cheques not accepted.***

Published 19.iv 1999

26.iv 1999

PITTA

Bulletin of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh No. 96 : April 1999

Indexed 14.2.2000

PROGRAMME

FIELD OUTING: 11-4-1999: Anantgiri Hills, Vikarabad, Rangareddi District: Members are requested to assemble near bus stand at Anantgiri, by 8.30am. This will be a full-day trip and members are requested to be prepared with lunch and drinking water.

INDOOR MEETING: 19-4-1999, 6 p.m.: KBR National Park matters and discussion on the BSAP project. Vidyaranya High School, Opp., Secretariat, Saifabad, Hyderabad 500004.

NOTES & NEWS

Field Trip to Manjira Wildlife Sanctuary—21-3-1999

J.V.D. Moorty

The bus dropped Kulkarni and me at the junction on NH9—the Mumbai highway—leading to Sangareddy, at 7.15am. We had started from Imlibun at 5.45am. It had taken us about an hour and a half to cover the 55 kms. We loosened stiff limbs with a cuppa before talking down an auto-rickshaw from Rs. 25/- to Rs. 3/- per head to drop us at the Sangareddy police station 5kms away. The ride lasted a jerky 10 minutes and we began our trek towards the dam. Opposite the police station is a graveyard with two massive fig trees—a protected area, as Kullu observed, for the trees and their avian and other guests. The trees were in fruit playing host to a number of Koels *Eudynamys scolopacea*, Common Mynas *Acridotheres tristis* and House Crows *Corvus splendens* as well. Our 5km walk towards the Manjira barrage took us past wide-awake villages and lush green paddy fields. A pair of Whitebreasted Waterhens *Amaurornis phoenicurus* sounded very much in love in the field adjoining the path. A pair of Redrumped Swallows *Hirundo daurica* disappeared under a culvert on the dirt track. Kullu immediately went after them for a shoot. Following behind I saw him taking a close-up view of an almost completed nest. Ashycrowned Finchlarks *Eremopterix grisea* delivered their whistling song on the up and the down swing on wing. A flash of red attracted us to a Rufous-tailed Finchlark *Ammomanes phoenicurus* busy looking up insects. A flock of Spotted Munias *Lonchura punctulata* whirred their way across the fields. We were spotted by a flock of 4 Comb Ducks *Sarkidiornis melanotos* honking their way across the sky. Some unidentified warblers flitted in and out of the standing crop—we saw, but we did not know them! The last half kilometer stretch, on Bhanu's and Subrahmanyam's mobikes, saw us stop for another quick tea just outside the sanctuary, where a Purple Sunbird *Nectarina asiatica* quenched its thirst from a water tap! We were welcomed into the sanctuary by a flock of garrulous Whiteheaded Babblers *Turdoides affinis*.

Manjira Wildlife Sanctuary lies between the Manjira and Singur barrages and is spread over an area of 20km^2. The sanctuary as such follows the course of the Manjira. Manjira and Singur together provide nearly 150 million gallons of drinking water daily, to Hyderabad and Secunderabad. The area was declared a Wildlife Sanctuary in 1978. The sanctuary has a thick growth of Babool, *Prosopis* and *Ipomea* that, put together, offer excellent nesting sites for birds. The Environment Education Centre, with a museum, library—a very good collection of books on birds and other animals and nature—and an auditorium, set up to educate visitors about nature conservation and maintenance of ecological balance, was our rendezvous. The foresters told us that we were the second batch to arrive after Mary Peacock, Ron Grasser and Tom Hash, who were already on the bund, birding. Thick *Ipomea* along the foot of the bund saw agitated activity of Redvented Bulbuls *Pycnonotus cafer*, the rather large Indian Great Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus stentoreus* and Large Pied Wagtails *Motacilla maderaspatensis*. A flock of 34 Lesser Whistling Teal *Dendrocygna javanica* advertised their presence by taking off from the reeds in a flurry of wings and whistles. A smaller flock of 8 Cotton Teal *Nettapus coromandelianus* swam about almost inconspicuously. Alarmed by our proximity a Yellow Bittern *Ixobrychus sinensis* sought shelter amongst a thicker clump. A Bronzewinged Jacana *Metopidius indicus* trotted its way delicately over the lily leaves. A family of 3 Indian Moorhens *Gallinula chloropus* foraged amongst the reeds and *Ipomea* whilst above them a Baya *Ploceus philippinus* was hard at work designing a house for a prospective mate. A Golden Oriole *Oriolus oriolus* cut a yellow swathe through the trees. A Coucal *Centropus sinensis* boomed its morning calls. A Crimsonbreasted Barbet *Megalaima haemacephala* got its smithy going. Bluetailed Bee-eaters *Merops philippinus* performed their usual aerobatics for for breakfast. Common Swallows, Redrumped Swallows *Hirundo daurica* and Wiretailed Swallows *Hirundo smithii* appeared to connect two telephone poles.

At 9.30am the others arrived and almost immediately set out on boats to the islands. There are about 9 small islands that are the main breeding and nesting grounds for birds. We jumped into the second launch. Just before we started, we saw two fishermen in coracles paddling away furiously to avoid getting caught by the forest officials accompanying us. Enroute to the island a lone Osprey *Pandion haliaetus* perched on a protruding branch watched us go by, and Aasheesh drew our attention to two Common Sandgrouse *Pterocles exustus* flashing past overhead. The main island was chock full with birds. I counted 138 Painted Storks *Mycteria leucocephala*. Their nests were on a few trees and our launch, with its motor switched off, approached one, close to the water's edge, that held 4 small fluffy white chicks. The parent, torn between self-preservation and protecting its babies, finally opted for the former, but circled worriedly overhead. Nestlings were protected from the blazing sun, by shade-providing parents, standing over them with half-open wings. The photographers clicked away merrily and we moved away quickly to enable the adult to get back to its young. The sighting of 13 Darters *Anhinga melanogaster* in the heronry was a pleasant surprise. There were also about 56 Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*, numerous Little

Cormorants *Phalacrocorax niger* and Large Cormorants *P. carbo*, Night Herons *Nycticorax nycticorax* and Purple Herons *Ardea purpura*. We circled the island and headed shorewards, disturbing a small flock of Little Grebes *Tachybaptus ruficollis* which hurriedly flat-footed it across our bows into the reeds. A Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus* quartered the banks for some rodents and other tasty morsels. Walking back to the Centre I saw a flock of House Sparrows *Passer domesticus*—now such a rarity in the city.

Settling down for brunch we were shown a video film on the Manjira Wildlife Sanctuary followed by another one on the tiger. In between there was a visual treat of watching mugger crocodiles *Crocodylus palustris* being fed. With the sun getting hotter, we decided to head back. Though we hadn't seen as many species as we'd expected—the foresters assured us that Openbilled Storks *Anastomus oscitans* and other species of duck were all there amongst the thick vegetation along the shore and inland, in the adjoining fields. We came away satisfied after a good day's birding. What was also heartening, from a city dweller's point of view, was the fact that there was plenty of water in the reservoir (the reading stood at 1530') to see us through the approaching summer months. It is imperative that areas like these be kept free from unauthorized human activity—as they are the last refuges for many creatures all of whom have an equal right to share this planet.

Kolleru Lake *Siraj A. Taher*

Ever since 1987 Kolleru Lake is one place, which was never well covered during the annual Asian Waterfowl Census. Even though one or two areas were being counted, a greater part of the lake could not be visited for logistic and other reasons. With this in mind, four members of the Society, Aasheesh, Sachin, Shafaat and I left in Aasheesh's car for Elluru (West Godavari) on the morning of 23rd February. Kulkarni was to join us the next morning. The journey was uneventful but pleasant and the casual bird sightings during the drive totalled 30 species. On reaching Elluru, we met the Divisional Forest Officer (Wildlife), Mr. Subrahmanyam who arranged a short trip for us in the evening to Atapaka, near Kaikalur town (27kms for Elluru). After lunch, when we reached this place, we were greeted with a most wonderful sight. Thousands of ducks were on the lake, mostly Lesser Whistling Teals, Pintails and a few other ducks amongst them. Several egrets, Purple Moorhens, Cormorants, Pond and Grey Herons, Coots, and Dabchicks were also seen.

It was shocking to see the changes and degradation that had taken place in the areas leading to Kaikalur from Elluru and in and around Atapaka and this part of Kolleru lake. Hundreds of hectares had been reclaimed and encroached upon for agricultural but mainly for aquaculture (fish farms). I had seen Kaikalur in 1983 and the change from a small sleepy village with a few hundred huts and one or two pleasing old buildings to a booming town of haphazard growth, ugly buildings, latest cars, polluting industries and acres of aqua farms was unbelievable. Kolleru seems to be dying.

A good nights' rest and we were back at Atapaka on 24th morning for the bird count. We counted (or estimated) about 40-50 thousand ducks of which nearly 80% were Whistling Teals - 80%; Pintails - 10% and Spotbill, Wigeons Redcrested Pochards, Garganeys and Common Teals - 10%. The usual egrets, cormorants, herons and coots were seen in good members. This was no place for the waders except a few sandpipers here and there.

In the afternoon we visited Allapada (20kms from Kaikalur) and the Upputeru drain. This takes the Kolleru waters out into the sea (Bay of Bengal) and is the largest drain from the lake. Vegetative growth, both in the Upputeru and Kolleru Lake was excessive, probably because of the release of polluted water from the aqua farms. There was a busy boat jetty on the Upputeru, at the junction with Allapada-Allapadaruvu Road. The boats here catered to the transport of people, fish, fish food, manure, fertilizer, salt, chemicals, etc. At Allapada we saw small flocks (40-60 birds) of Night Herons flying west to east and Glossy Ibises from east to west, around 5pm. Flocks of House Sparrows (about 60-70 birds) were perched on the wires near the jetty, probably for grain and other tid-bits that drop during loading/unloading. These birds are a rare sight in urban areas now. We all took a very pleasant boat ride in the Forest Department's launch with the boatman giving a running commentary on the area, habitat and birds. During the trip, besides various common birds, we saw a single Yellow Bittern and were back before dark. Here a generous village lady offered us hot coffee in fresh milk, which was much appreciated.

The truck traffic at Kaikalur was so heavy at night that it was disturbing in more ways than one—first, it disturbed sleep and second, it indicated a tremendous increase in commercial activity in and around the town. This town (and its surrounds) has become a busy transit and is the hub of all marketing, industrial and fish farming activity. Chilling plants, ice-factories, and transport of food grains and fertilizer to and through the region have added to the problems here.

Next morning we left early for Nidamarru (past Akkiveedu and Undi) and onto Devuragopuram, from where we took a launch to traverse the Pandikodu Canal and the eastern part of Kolleru Lake. All along the canal, an important waterway for the surrounding population, there was heavy infestation of hyacinth, ipomeia and other vegetation. Several birds were sighted along the way on both sides—the more interesting being the Black, Yellow and Chestnut Bitterns, good number of Pond Herons and Whitebreasted Waterhens and cormorants. At one or two places, over the banks and in the far off rice fields, we estimated huge flocks of egrets (8000+), terns (4000+), Openbill Storks (4000+) and Blackwinged Stilts (1000+) At one place, the Forest Ranger intercepted a fisherman in a 'dug-out' who had an Indian Moorhen and a Bluebreasted Banded Rail *Rallus striatus*.

All of us were quite excited to have been handling this rather 'rare' rail. After taking their measurements and several pictures and giving the birds some respite from their trauma they were released in the water and lo! — in a flash they had rushed into the reeds. A couple hours of boat-ride and we were in the Kolleru lake. So heavily choked was it with weeds that the boat could not proceed very far, even with 'punting', and we had to turn back. All along the canal from Devuragopuram, we could see heavy diesel engines either drawing water from the lake (or canal) for the fields and aqua farms or pumping polluted water back into the lake. No wonder there is such heavy pollution in Kolleru and excessive growth of weeds.

This is not an account of the number of birds seen (or not seen) or the numbers counted. At any time of the season, in the past, Kolleru supported a few lakh waterbirds, both migratory and resident. Today the picture is very dismal and this is rather a sad story of the apathy, neglect and mismanagement by many departments and agencies. Our brief and cursory survey only highlights the ground reality at the most important freshwater lake in Andhra Pradesh. Personally I would say Kolleru is gone and is beyond reclamation. The government and authorities have neglected it for too long (it was declared a closed area in 1963 and a sanctuary in 1973). Twenty-five years is too long a time, no matter what the compulsions, for the Notification of the Kolleru Lake as a bird sanctuary. Political and money power has played havoc here and continues to do so even now despite court rulings. Everyone in the region has paid a heavy price for all this havoc and

A DIRECTORY OF INDIAN BIRD WATCHERS

THE QUESTIONNAIRE

Kindly complete this Questionnaire and mail it to : **Dr Kumar Ghorpadé, P. O. Box 8439, Bangalore 560 084, India,** at your earliest. First, xerox additional copies for colleagues, if needed. Many thanks.

---

1. **Name :** ( ) Male ( ) Female
2. **Address :** (Give pin code, phone number, & e-mail address also please)
   Home :

   Office/Institution :

3. Date & place of birth :
4. Education & Profession :
5. Do you possess binoculars ? ( ) Yes ( ) No ( ) Can be borrowed ( ) Will buy
6. Do you possess a camera ? ( ) Yes ( ) No ( ) Can be borrowed ( ) Will buy
7. Do you keep a collection of your bird photos/slides ? ( ) Yes ( ) No
8. Personal conveyance : ( ) Car ( ) Two-wheeler ( ) Bicycle ( ) None
9. Started bird watching in the year :
10. Brief account of how you were introduced to bird watching : [Please state on reverse]
11. Personal ornithological status : ( ) Professional ( ) Amateur ( ) Novice
12. Localities most often visited for bird watching : [Please list on reverse]
13. Do you keep field notes on birds ? ( ) Yes ( ) No ( ) Will, in future
14. Names of City/District/Ecosystem/Protected Area/Other habitat -- bird lists maintained by you : [Please list on reverse]
15. Special field(s) of interest in birds :
16. Average number of bird watching walkabouts and outstation trips each year : &
17. Number of your articles/notes published in : ( ) Journals ( ) Newsletters ( ) Newspapers ( ) Souvenirs ( ) Others
    [Please send us reprints/xeroxes, if available]
18. Membership of scientific societies/associations : [Please list on reverse]
19. Local bird watchers' club/group near you : [Details on reverse please]
20. Number of bird books & journals in your library [A list would be appreciated] :
21. Nearest library stocked with bird books and/or journals :
22. How can you assist/entertain visiting bird watchers in your home town /village ?
    ( ) Accomodation and food at home ( ) Only accomodation ( ) Only food ( ) Arrange hotel accomodation ( ) Provide transport ( ) Arrange transport ( ) Accompany them in the field ( ) Arrange guidance in field otherwise. Specify any other assistance you could provide.
23. Other hobbies or animal/plant group interests :

(Signature)

(Enclosed with PITTA #96, April 1999)

as the pelicans deserted this lake several decades back, humans will probably be forced to do the same one day. If the process can be reversed—it will be a miracle. Let us hope for one!

An excellent photo field guide to *Some South Indian Butterflies* by K. Gunathilagaraj, TNA Perumal, K Jayaram and M Ganesh Kumar, published by the Nilgiri Wildlife and Environment Association covers 113 species belonging to 9 families with 151 colour photos taken by eminent wildlife photographers and naturalists is available in most leading book shops at regular price of Rs395/-. This book is one of the best for introducing nature lovers to the fascinating hobby of Butterfly-watching, which is rapidly gaining popularity. Ideal field guide, refrence book with simply stunning pictures covers the adult and larval descriptions, distributions and also about the food plants of the larva. For those of you who wish to avail a concessional price can write to Merlin Nature Club for a copy at a Special Price of Rs300/- excluding postage. [J.N. Prasad, 13, 8th Cross, 30th Main, Sarakki I.T.I. Layout, J.P. Nagar I Phase, Bangalore 560078.]

A preliminary report received from S Sridhar and Paresh U Karmarkar, informs us of "The discovery of a nascent breeding colony of endangered **Painted Storks** ***Mycteria leucocephala*** and **Grey Herons** ***Ardea cinerea*** at **Kaggaladu** about 9km from **Sira, (Karnataka)** by the members of Wildlife Aware Nature Club (WANC) of **Tumkur**. There are around 600 painted storks and 100 grey herons, building nests and raising their young ones on nine Tamarind *Tamarindus indica* trees in the village. Members of WANC counted around 121 active nests of painted storks and 31 of grey herons." Towards evening, this population is augmented by the arrival of more painted storks and grey herons for roosting. WANC members have also observed a couple of Grey Pelicans *Pelecanus philippinus*. ....*Continued on page 5.*

LETTER FROM AN INSECT-HUNTING ORNITHOLOGIST—24

"As we pass from the more ancient types of birds (such as the struthious birds, the grebes, the tinamous, etc.) to what we may call the modern birds (i.e., the "Songbirds"), the differences between the family groups we have set up become less and less. In fact, this is really forced upon us by the great evolutionary proliferation of modern birds. They constitute much more than half of all the species now known. Yet if we rigidly maintained the same standards. . . . . we would probably place all passerine birds (or at least the songbirds—the suborder Passeres) [all of our Passeriformes, except the 2 Broadbill and 5 Pitta species, # 864-871—KG] in one family. Since this is obviously inexpedient, we have divided these songbirds into 44 to 48 families."

[J. van Tyne & A.J. Berger, 1959, Fundamentals of Ornithology, p. 377]

". . . . . we consider it preferable to recognize the Muscicapidae, Sylviidae, and Turdidae as distinct families rather than to merge them into one huge and unwieldy family [= 1109 spp.], as was done by Hartert. It may be repeated that the above three groups evidently do represent the main lines of divergence within this admittedly allied assemblage, and the several stocks are not less worthy of recognition because a small number of more generalized types tend to link them up and do not fit readily into simple definitions. In any case definition is not rendered any easier by lumping them together."

[H.F. Witherby *et al.*, 1938, Handbook of British Birds, Vol. 2, p. 1]

"Wetmore (1930) published a taxonomic sequence based mainly on the work of Gadow (1893), who developed a classification based on the study of 40 characters . . . . . Wetmore himself (1960), stated that 'the order of arrangement in the Passeriformes as said above is in part necessarily arbitrary', while Streseman (1959) felt that 'in the absence of trustworthy information . . . . . it becomes a matter of convention how to group [birds] into orders'. Sibley *et al.* (1988) and Sibley & Ahlquist (1990) proposed a major reassessment of the relationships between birds, based on DNA-DNA hybridization studies, which led to the species sequence used in Sibley & Monroe's world checklist (1990), the starting point of this OBC checklist. . . . . Their list differs radically at familial and ordinal level from the Wetmore sequence and its derivatives. However, despite the advantage [*sic*! —KG] of using a single measurement that reflects phylogeny to order the sequence. Sibley & Monroe's tapestry has not been widely embraced to date, although in some cases their species limits have been adopted. The reasons for this can be split broadly into two groups: practical disadvantages and concern over the validity of the results."

[T. Inskipp *et al.*, 1996, An Annotated Checklist of the Birds of the Oriental Region, p.6]

Before I continue with my analysis of the bird Orders extant (or extinct) in our sub-continent and list the endemic species in each, I should say that I am pleased to have received from Aasheesh Pittie a report of readers' responses to my Letters in *Pitta*. Your editor tells me that half of you don't read me at all but the other half "love" my writings! This is a fair reaction — I hope those of you who cannot understand or appreciate my Letters now, will be able to do so, in time. Aasheesh also tells me that some of you feel I delve a little too much in the "distant" past and that some dislike the excessive 'I' in me. To quote Santayana from his Life of Reason — "Those who cannot remember the past are doomed to repeat it." How can you perceive *the whole elephant* if you want only to look at his tail and forget his massive head and resplendent white tusks that have just passed you? Would you be satisfied with a sub-continent full of sparrows, weavers, munias, finches and buntings only (and perhaps the crows and koel as well!) and resign yourself to the *extinction* of every other Passeriformes member, besides the other, more *primitive* bird Orders? And would you like to have Kundanlal Sehgal and Suraiya's vocal magic *erased* from our minds and reconcile yourselves to a bouncing Baba Sehgal or the classically impoverished likes of Sunita Rao and Raageshwari? Feedback from you is welcome and I also appreciate and enjoy fair debate, on any subject, but with an *open* mind.

Pittie also recently sent me a photocopy of Krys Kazmierczak & Raj Singh's "Birds of India" checklist (pp. 295-321) from their 1998 publication A Birdwatcher's Guide to India. In a day and a half I was able to cross-check, species by species (1,236, not "1220". In 420 genera), this strictly *politically Indian* list with my database and have had to make some additions and alterations to the table I presented in my Letter # 22 (Pitta 94, February 1999, p. 4). The totals now read — 20 Orders, 436 Genera (16 endemic), 1,408 Species (295 endemic). Modified numbers of genera and species (and their endemics) of each Order (and some Families) will be given as I analyze them below and in future Letters, but the Non-Passeriformes now have 247 Genera (8 endemic) and 632 Species (112 endemic) while the Passeriformes total 189 Genera (8 endemic) and 776 Species (183 endemic). This above new book lists a further 53 *subspecies* of which 30 are in addition to the 1,236 species taxa, making a total of 1,266 bird *forms* occurring in the Indian Union. As the authors state, there

are 8 species "new to the country having apparently been reliably observed in recent years but the records not yet fully documented". But only a further 16 (not "17") species are listed "whose occurrence is open to doubt, or which have not been sufficiently well documented". They also identify 54 species "endemic to India", 77 species "endemic to the Indian Subcontinent" (no explanation is given as to what this area means), and 31 species "near-endemic to the Indian Subcontinent, i.e., most of the species' range falls within the Subcontinent", making a total of 162 *endemic* species. Besides, they also underline 188 "species of conservation concern". Of the 3 species they "no longer recognise[d] as valid", two are misidentifications for other valid species, but they also name *Psittacula intermedia* Rothschild, as "Intermediate Parakeet", which I had laboured to show was a probably good species in Letter # 17 (*Pitta* 87, July 1998). They also document 9 other species which they write "have been excluded from the checklist", most of which are non-Indian (political boundaries), but three of these were in fact recorded from Rajasthan, Ladakh or northern Sikkim, which all fall within the Indian Union! It would need an extended, analytical, review to deal satisfactorily with my opinion of this yet another new book on our avifauna, but at least the checklist presented by them has been pretty carefully prepared. Their use of Ripley's SYNOPSIS sequence, however, was a blessing in cross-checking, though they unfortunately omitted to give SYNOPSIS numbers. My reservations stem from the fact (apart from several omissions and errors noticed) that this *Indian* work sadly follows the books of Roberts (1991-1992), Harvey (1990), Smythies (1986) and the Inskipps (1991, 1995) on the birds of Pakistan, Bangladesh, Burma, Nepal and Bhutan—areas that are not islands (at least !), but are politically circumscribed. Science loses and Politics wins, a situation that I believe does not augur well for the future. Now to go on with my analysis of our bird Orders and their endemics. I am not going to even mention Sibley & Monroe's "tapestry" (except rarely), so hurriedly embraced by Inskipp *et al.*, because phylogenetic relationships, though useful, are not seminal to a practical, useful reference system of birds. More chaos than order will result in adopting, unquestionably, this *new* sequence. Though their endemics remain the same, the Order Galliformes now have 26 genera and 51 species, since we must also include *Phasianus colchicus* Linnaeus, the Ring-necked Pheasant, which has been introduced into our region. Krys and Raj use "Common Pheasant" (as well as the *new* English names, unfortunately, of Inskipp *et al.*, 1996) for this and give "li?" as the "symbol" for it, which is not explained in their introductory notes, though an "i" is said to mean "introduced". The cryptic "l" perhaps means "locally"? The Galliformes are classified into 4 living and 1 fossil Families and the *ca* 268 known species (in 78 genera) are found all over the world except in interior Greenland, the Sahara and Arabian deserts and in New Zealand (here birds of 3 families have been introduced). In our region, only the Phasianidae and Megapodiidae (shifted to a new Order, Craciformes, by DNA-believers!) occur, and I have dealt with them in my last Letter.

Before going on to the Divers and three other bird Orders associated with aquatic ecosystems, I must mention that the most primitive Struthioniformes (7 living species in 5 genera) must also be included in our sub-continent's ornithological database. The Ostrich (*Struthio camelus*) was discovered, in fossil form, in "N. India" (J. Fisher & R.T. Peterson, 1964, The World of Birds, p. 148, map). Several other animals, now known from Africa, have had their fossils discovered mainly in the Indo-Gangetic Plains and the Himalayan Sivalik foothills, The 'subspecies' *S.c. syriacus* is now found running about in the Syrian and Arabian deserts and there were 6 other species (now extinct) of the single living genus and species of ostriches.

Reverting to the well-known Wetmore sequence used by Ripley (and a majority of ornithologists), the Gaviiformes include a single family, Gaviidae, which comprises of 5 living species (of a single genus and family) of Divers (or Loons) that are arctic and north temperate in residence. Two species (*Gavia arctica* and *G. stellata*), the Black-throated and Red-throated Divers, have been reported, as vagrants, from the Mekran coast of the Trans-Indus sub-area and the Punjab Doab. These biogeographical sub-areas will be introduced and discussed in my forthcoming paper in the *Indian Journal of Biodiversity*.

The Podicipediformes, or Grebes, have 20 species (in 5 genera of a single family) found everywhere except the Arctic, Antarctic, the Sahara Arabian deserts, dense jungles of the Malay Archipelago, and parts of the Australian desert. We have 5 species of both genera — *Podiceps* Latham and *Tachybaptus* Reichenbach — three breed here and the other two are recorded as occasional winter visitors.

Petrels, Shearwaters and Albatrosses, birds of the mighty oceans, are the Procellariiformes, including 4 families and 103 species (23 genera) that also inhabit the seacoasts of all the continents, including Antarctica. Only the Procellariidae (Petrels and Shearwaters) and the Hydrobatidae (Storm-Petrels) occur in our seas. A total of 17 species (10 genera) have been recorded here, mainly as accidentals, but Audubon's Shearwater *Puffinus lherminieri* breeds in the Maldive Islands. Our 10 genera are *Daption* Stephens, *Pseudobulweria* Mathews, *Bulweria* Bonaparte, *Pterodroma* Bonaparte (all Petrels); *Calonectris* Mathews & Iredale, *Puffinus* Brisson (Shearwaters); *Oceanites* Keyserling & Blasius, *Fregetta* Bonaparte, *Oceanodroma* Reichenbach, and *Pelagodroma* Reichenbach (all Storm-Petrels).

The Order Pelecaniformes includes 6 families of Pelicans, Tropicbirds, Gannets, Boobies, Cormorants, Darters and Frigatebirds. They are oceanic as well as frequent inland waters, both lotic (streams and rivers) and lentic (lakes, ponds and artificial *tanks* and dam reservoirs), and except in desert areas, occur all over the world, some 61 species in 9 genera. The Tropicbirds *Phaethon* Linnaeus are represented by 3 species in our region, and the White-tailed *P. lepturus* breeds in the Maldives. There are also 3 species of Pelicans *Pelecanus* Linnaeus in our area, of which two breed and the Dalmatian *P. crispus* winters here. The Boobies *Sula* Brisson are also 3 here and all of them are post-breeding visitors to our coasts or islands. Of the 4 Cormorants *Phalacrocorax* Brisson, the Pygmy *P. pygmaeus* was recorded once from Baluchistan, while the others are all resident breeders. The Indian Shag *P. fuscicollis* is endemic to our sub-continent, since it extends only to Burma and south to the isthmus of Tenasserim. I believe Burma rightly belongs in the Indian Subregion, its biodiversity derived mainly from this rather than from the Indo-Chinese or Indo-Malayan Subregions of the Oriental Biogeographical Region. The Oriental Darter *Anhinga* Brisson, *A. melanogaster*, is resident and distributed from India to the Philippines and Celebes (Indonesia). Some 3 Frigatebirds *Fregata* Laciphde straggle into Indian waters offshore and the Least Frigatebird *F. ariel* breeds in the Maldive Islands.

[Errata in Letter # 23 _ The words "firangees" (line 4 from bottom of para 1) and "mantra" (line 2 from bottom of para 1) on p. 3 should have been typeset in italics.]

--- **Dr Kumar Ghorpadé**, P.O. Box 8439, Bangalore 560 084 & e-mail: varanus.kg@mailcity.com

...Continued from page 3.

"Traditionally, vultures have been classified as a family of raptors, or birds of prey. They have been considered to be a distinctive family, restricted to the New World, not to be confused with the Old World vultures. But there were anomalies that prompted some scientists to wonder if they were raptors at all. Modern DNA analysis demonstrates that they are, in fact, storks!

As storks, they display a classic example of what is called convergence. That means they have independently evolved characteristics similar to those of unrelated Old World vultures under similar conditions. That particularly includes a bare head, which is easier to keep clean after its owner has been dining on rotting carcasses. The more traditional storks have a wing shape suitable to soaring, which has been improved upon by our New World vultures and condors. And some storks, such as the marabou of Africa, have bare heads and are carrion-eaters. But, while the other storks have long, straight beaks, our New World vultures and condors have evolved hooked beaks, so similar to those of raptors that the birds were classified as such."

[Barry Kent MacKay in *The Toronto Star*, Sunday, March 21, 1999].

Bombay Natural History Society urgently requires:

Network Coordinator for Indian Bird Conservation Network. Qualification: Post-Graduate in science, preferably with an ornithological background. Experience: Organizational and network skills, excellent oral and written communication skills, experience in proposal writing, fund raising and diplomacy. Minimum 5 years experience. Some experience of organizing workshops. Thorough computer literacy, orientation towards natural history and birds preferred. Age limit: 35 years. Remuneration: Starting around Rs10,000 (with annual increment).

IBA (Ornithology) Officer for Important Bird Areas Project. Qualification: Post-Graduate in Biology, preferably Wildlife (ornithology). Experience: Three to five years experience on bird research. Ability to collate, collect and analyze bird data. Thorough computer literacy. Ability to work under pressure and tight deadlines. Willingness to travel frequently within India. Some experience of organizing workshops. Age limit: Below 35 years. Remuneration: Starting around Rs9,000 (with annual increment).

IBA Information Officer for Important Bird Areas Project. Qualification: Post-Graduate, with excellent computer literacy. Experience: 3-5 years experience of collating, collecting and organizing wildlife data. Ability to work under pressure and tight deadlines. Willingness to travel frequently within India. Some experience of organizing workshops. Age limit: Below 35 years. Remuneration: Starting around Rs9,000 (with annual increment).

All appointments are initially for 1 year but likely to continue for 5 years. Please apply before 15 April 1999 giving full-bio-data marking the envelope with the post applied for to the Director, Bombay Natural History Society, Hornbill House, Shaheed Bhagat Singh Road, Mumbai 400023. [*A.R. Rahmani, Director, BNHS*]

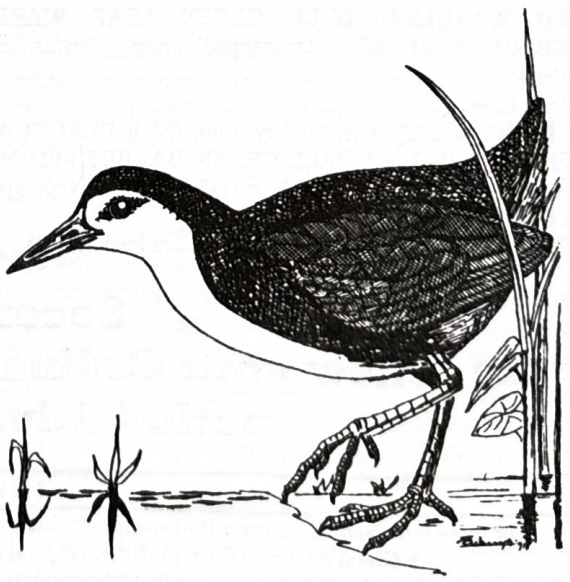
The Third International Symposium on the Biology, Conservation and Cultural Significance of Owls, **OWLS 2000**, will be hosted by The Australasian Raptor Association (ARA) from 19-23 January 2000. The contact address is Manning Clark Centre, Australian National University, Canberra, Australia. The ARA has established an Owls 2000 website at: http://www.tasweb.com.au/owls2000/index.htm. At this website you can register your interest in the conference; obtain information on program development and pre and post conference events; network with other amateur and professional owl enthusiasts and; provide guidance and feedback to the Owls 2000 committee.

The conference will be an excellent opportunity to present papers on owl research, conservation, rehabilitation and public education. The conference will also provide a forum to discuss topics of national and international significance, and thus contribute to conservation solutions and management. Field excursions to local points of interest will be conducted on 21 January, providing a wonderful opportunity for participants to observe some of Australia's owls and non-raptorial species. For those who wish to see more, a variety excursion is being planned both before and after the conference.

The presentations, activities, forums and displays planned for Owls 2000 will bring together a diverse range of interests to highlight the environmental and cultural importance of the owls of the world. The agenda which is being developed will include topics such as: breeding biology (physiology, behaviour and productivity); captive management (rehabilitation-achieving conservation benefits, the role of zoos in managing captive populations); cultural significance (owls in religions, taboos, totems and superstitions); capture, marking and monitoring techniques; ecology of owls (urban, forest, grassland, dessert, islands); habitat management and conservation (owls as biodiversity indicators, ecosystem approaches to conserving owl habitats and prey species, forestry versus owls—solutions and sustainability, management on indigenous community lands); parasitology; taxonomy of owls of the world; threatened species management (recovery plans, threatening processes and solutions) and; toxicology (rodenticides, heavy metals, herbicides and other pesticides).

The Society has received a few wonderful gifts in the past couple of months. Mr Kashinath donated an excellent video film on the Jurong Bird Park in Singapore. Mary Peacock gifted us a copy of Sálim Ali's *Book of Indian Birds*. Dr S Subramanya has generously sent us a large collection of his line drawings and Ambareesh Pittie donated stickers with the BSAP's message and name on it. Sachin, always ready to help, did the artwork for both the stickers. We thank them whole-heartedly for their generosity!

Another colourful sticker, depicting a Great Indian Hornbill, is available for sale. Same rates as the earlier one. Write to Hon. Secretary for further details.



CONTACT NOTES

"While scanning through the Society's journal…I came across an interesting record from the Andhra Pradesh-Orissa border. The note is by C.H. Donald (16(3): 504-505). He recorded having seen 'crowds' of harriers on the top of an extensive plateau of the 'Jeypore hills in Vizagapatnam district' (now Jeypure, Koraput District, Orissa).... Birder friends from Vizagpatnam area…could try to locate the place mentioned and see if the roost still exists. There may be chances of finding the Great Indian Bustard and the Lesser Florican, since he describes an extensive grassland on the plateau. Let's hope the third largest roost of harriers in the subcontinent [after Velavadar (Gujarat) and Rollapadu (Andhra Pradesh)] gets re-discovered!"

— Ranjit Manakadan, Mumbai

BIRDING NOTES *Compiled by Aasheesh Pittie*

This column publishes birding notes in brief telegraphic form, from **Andhra Pradesh, Goa, Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra & Tamil Nadu** on interesting and significant sightings and behaviour like breeding, feeding, migration, nesting, etc. Notes on flowering and fruiting trees and their relationship with birds are also welcome. English names and classification follow, S.D. Ripley's *A Synopsis of the Birds of India and Pakistan* (1982, 2nd ed.) and scientific nomenclature, T. Inskipp, N. Lindsey & W. Duckworth's *An Annotated Checklist of the Birds of the Oriental Region* (1996). Unless specified, all observations are for 1999. Abbreviations, Contributors, Notes, Regional Referees, *etc.*, are at the end. For selection of breeding criteria 'Probable, Possible, Confirmed', see *Pitta* # 82, February 1998, p. 4.

ANDHRA PRADESH

HYDERABAD DISTRICT

Nehru Zoological Park 14.2 (HT, KCR)

DABCHICK CB 2 ad., 1 juv., 4 chicks; PARIAH KITE PRB 1 bird near a N; MARSH HARRIER; WHITEBREASTED WATERHEN CB 1 ad., with 2 imm.; INDIAN MOORHEN CB 2 ad., 1 imm., and 2 chicks; COMMON HAWK-CUCKOO; WHITEBELLIED DRONGO; COMMON WOOD SHRIKE; BROOKS'S FLYCATCHER[1]; MAGPIE-ROBIN POB M singing; BLACK REDSTART.

NALGONDA DISTRICT

Bibinagar Tank (RM)

BARHEADED GOOSE 7.3: 22. 10.3: 200; PINTAIL 7.3: 150. 10.3: 400+; REDCRESTED POCHARD 7.3: 77. 10.3: 89; SPOTBILL DUCK 7.3: 600+; 10.3: 700+; COMMON TEAL 7.3: 100+. 10.3: 100+; BLACK IBIS 7.3: 40. 10.3: 53; INDIAN SANDGROUSE 7.3: 250+. 10.3: 250+; ROSY PASTOR 7.3: 100. 10.3: 100.

KARNATAKA

BANGALORE DISTRICT

Bannerghatta National Park 28.3 (JNP)

PALE HARRIER 1 M; BLACKNAPED ORIOLE 2; BLACKNAPED FLYCATCHER 1; BLYTH'S REED WARBLER; BOOTED WARBLER; DULL GREEN LEAF WARBLER; BLACKBIRD 1 M of 'Blackcapped' race *Turdus merula nigropileus*.

Bangalore City

GREY PELICAN 27.3: 1 at Sankey Tank (SK); BLACKCAPPED KINGFISHER 1 (PSM); SMALL GREEN BARBET PRB N under const.; COPPERSMITH CB N with yng (JNP, RK).

Dodda Gubbi

SPOTTED MUNIA PRB N under const in Ixora bush (APA).

Hoskote Tank 31.1 (JNP)

GREY PELICAN 47 feeding, roosting.

MAHARASHTRA

NASHIK DISTRICT

Gangapur Dam (BR, SG, SR, NB)

BARHEADED GOOSE 15.2: 2; PINTAIL 22.1: 92; BLACKWINGED KITE 16.2: CB 2 ad., 1 yng.GREY PARTRIDGE 28.2: CB 2 ad., 2 yng; JUNGLE BUSH QUAIL 24.1: 28; INDIAN COURSER 10.2: 4; LITTLE BROWN DOVE 22.2: CB 2 ad., 2 yng; SHORTEARED OWL 4.1: 1; WRYNECK 4.1: 4; COLLARED SAND MARTIN 22.1: 8; GREY SHRIKE 28.2: CB N with 4 eggs in *Acacia leucophleia*, 6' up. One bird incubating; BROWN SHRIKE 22.1: 1; WHITETHROAT 22.1: 2.

Ozar (H.A.L. Factory) (BR, SG, SR, NB)

GREAT INDIAN BUSTARD 21.1 & 27.1: 1 M, 4 F, 1 yng.

ABBREVIATIONS: Ab-abundant; ad-adult/s; br-breeding; C-common/ly; CB-confirmed breeding; const-construction/ing; *c.*-approximately; disp-display/ing; F-female; flt-flight; fly-family; freq-frequent/ly; hrd-heard; id-identify/ied; imm-immature; inc-include/ing; Is-Island; juv-juvenile; LM-local migrant; M-male; mat-material; N-nest/ing/s; POB-possible breeding; PRB-probable breeding; plm-plumage; RF-Reserve Forest; Resp-respectively; Tlk-Taluk; vil-village; WL-wildlife; yng-young.

CONTRIBUTORS: AP Andheria (APA); B Raha (BR); H Taher (HT); JN Prasad (JNP); KC Ramakrishnan (KCR); N Bhure (NB); PS Madhusudan (PSM); R Kumar (RK); R Mathew (RM); S Gudsoorkar (SG); S Karthikeyan (SK); S Ranade (SR);

NOTES: [1] Members should look out for further sightings of this bird and establish its presence in the area.

REGIONAL REFEREES: Andhra Pradesh: A Pittie; Goa: H Lainer; Karnataka: JN Prasad; Kerala: PO Nameer; Maharashtra: N Jamdar; Tamil Nadu: V Santharam.

Second Reminder
Please renew your Ordinary / Student Membership for the period 1.iv.1999—31.iii.2000

For Private Circulation Only

For more information, write to: Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh, PO Box 45, Banjara Hills PO, Hyderabad 500034, India.
Editors: Aasheesh Pittie (3350683) & Siraj A Taher (3352607) **E-mail**: AASHEESH@HD1.VSNL.NET.IN
Membership (Rs): Admission=20; Ordinary=100, Student=25 per annum; Life=1,000. *Outstation cheques not accepted.*

Illustration: Dr S Subramanya.

PITTA

Bulletin of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh **No. 97 : May 1999**

PROGRAMME

FIELD OUTING: 9-5-1999: Nehru Zoological Park, Hyderabad: Members are requested to assemble near ticket booth, by 7.30am. This will be a half-day trip.

INDOOR MEETING: 17-5-1999, 6 p.m.: Award-winning film on rocks of Hyderabad. Vidyaranya High School, Opp., Secretariat, Saifabad, Hyderabad 500004.

NOTES & NEWS

INVITATION

The **Indian Council for Cultural Relations** (Ministry of External Affairs) cordially invites you to an exhibition (and sale) of **Birds in Relief** by **Sohel**, from 27-31 May 1999, at the ICCR Gallery, 1st Floor, Kala Bhavan, Ravindra Bharati Complex, Saifabad, Hyderabad. The gallery will be open from 11am-8pm on all days.

Sohel studied art and photography at the former Hyderabad School of Art. He later proceeded to London for higher studies in photography and art and worked there as a professional for six years. On his return to India he worked as a professional photographer in Bombay. He became part of the Bombay art circle and pursued his creative instincts in the field of art, experimenting in various mediums. After moving to Hyderabad, Sohel has developed an entirely new concept of presenting ***Birds in Relief***. Using his photographic eye, creativity, and individual perception, he has captured the grace, delicacy and moving power of various exotic birds in a medium that is a combination of Relief and Painting. These relief paintings are semi-realistic in treatment and bring out the 3-dimensional beauty of birds. Sohel builds up his compositions after creating volumes of sketches from a detailed study of the anatomy of birds. An example of Sohel's work is shown below. Your active participation with family and friends will make the exhibition a resounding success!

Caress 37"x24"

"Albatrosses sail in three dimensions. Dynamic soaring, it's called, a phrase clumsy and mechanistic. An albatross can set in motion a flight so perfectly balanced and attuned to the compound marvels of wind and water that it needn't land, or even flap its wings, for hours, for weeks, indeed, for months. Thanks to the reliable sorcery of physics, the wind right above the water blows more slowly than the wind higher up. If an albatross flying over the ocean wishes to go upwind but doesn't want to flap its wings to get there, it starts a long, slow dive toward the surface of the sea, where it enters the slower-moving air. Suppose the bird is flying at twenty miles an hour in a wind of fifty miles an hour. When it flies in the direction the wind is going, it crosses the sea surface at seventy miles an hour. But when it dives down into the barely moving air near the surface, it has a lot of momentum left over, which it can't shed. Finding itself with all this extra speed, it trades some of that seventy miles per hour for altitude, and shoots up even higher than it was before. It is still flying at twenty miles per hour, but at a higher altitude now, and so it turns downwind again, and continues its perpetual motion of swooping and soaring. Because it's crucial to get into the air moving at the lowest velocity, as near as possible tot he sea—every fraction of inch counts—albatrosses maneuver deftly, high-wire artists right at the sea surface. Sometimes you can actually see their feathers touch the water. Over the exploding, crazily tossing sea, albatrosses follow every minute fluctuation of the surface with their wing tips. And they have no need to flap. Indeed, an albatross flying six hundred miles will flap less than a sparrow crossing a narrow street...

"Albatrosses do nest, preferring out-of-the-way places, but they spend most of their lives on the wing, wandering the world's oceans. Nomadic, ever-moving, full of the wind's eloquence and swing, they are creatures bound inextricably to the sea. Amazing as it sounds, they can fly for four or five years without ever returning to land. In low winds, they stretch their wings out full like canvas sails. In high winds, they partly fold their wings and hold them in at an angle to decrease the sail area. Rough weather is an albatross's delight. It can even catnap while it flies. Because it has a small wind-speed recorder in its bill, it can doze while its brain goes on autopilot; a sudden gust of wind will send a quick signal to draw the wings in or stretch them out. In fact, an albatross has been known to hit the side of a boat while asleep. But when they do return to land, they use its green stage for all it's worth. Their courtship involves long, elaborate, Oriental-looking dances, full of kissing and caressing and posing like Kabuki dancers, and symphonic mating calls, which echo from the hillsides where they nest. Observers become enchanted with their beauty and their

customs. Their Latin names reflect the majesty and romance people have found in them, translating into such marvels as 'pale-backed moon goddess.' "

[Ackerman, Diane (1995): *The Rarest of the Rare. Vanishing Animals, Timeless Worlds*. Pps xxi+184. Vintage Books, New York.]

The much publicized 'Kolletikota Feast', in which wild birds were shot for food in the Kolleru Bird Sanctuary (Krishna District), has resulted in a spate of legal cases by the Andhra Pradesh Forest Department against the suspected hunters. We have heard rumblings of protest from the general public that every small incident is snowballed into an issue by the press. Let it not be forgotten that the crime was committed within a wildlife sanctuary in a state where hunting of wild animals is totally banned under law. That the enforcement of this law is rather ineffective is another matter and requires the concerned authority's urgent attention. All the more reason then that all such incidents should be punished under law so that it acts as a deterrent to future hunters.

Blind killing by un-informed hunters often results in the destruction of creatures that are either rare or endangered. The bag of birds shot dead at Kolleru had at least one such species that merits our grave concern. The Large Whistling Teal *Dendrocygna bicolor* was "formerly widespread in the Indian Subcontinent and Myanmar, the Asian population is now largely concentrated in NE India and Bangladesh... **Trends: Probably declining**." [Editors' emphasis. (Perennou, C, Mundkur, T, Scott, DA, Follestad, A & Kvenild, L (1994): The Asian Waterfowl Census 1987-91: Distribution and Status of Asian Waterfowl. AWB Publication No. 86. IWRB Publication No. 24. AWB, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia and IWRB, Slimbridge, U.K. 372 pp.)] Counts from India, for the Asian Waterfowl Census, in the years 1994-1996, resulted in an average of less than 2,000 individuals! Members of the Society found evidence of at least 8 Large Whistling Teals when they were called by the Curator of the Nehru Zoological Park, to assist in identification of the birds shot at Kolleru.

"In 1998, two English birders, Harry Howard and Derek Scott, took a year off work to travel around the world in an attempt to see all the bird families of th world in a single calendar year. Although Harry had been birding for over 20 years, he had never birded outside the British Isles, and for him this really was to be a trip of a lifetime.

Their primary goal was to see all 194 extant bird families recognised by Clements (1991). However, they also wanted to see the additional seven families recognised by Sibley & Monroe (1990) and as many as possible of another 30 or so groups of birds which have been given family status by other authors in recent years, *eg* the grouse (Tetraonidae) and the plantcutters (Phytotomidae). By the end of the year, they had spent a total of 206 days birding in 28 countries on six continents (all except Antarctica).

Their year began easily enough with a week of birding in the north of England, southern Scotland and East Anglia, which produced Bearded Tit—the only species of Panuridae seen all year, as well as the only grouse. In mid January, Harry and Derek left on an eight-week round-the-world trip in the Northern Hemisphere, taking in ten countries in Asia, North America, northern South America and the Caribbean. Then followed shorter trips to East Africa (Kenya and Uganda) in March and April, Kazakhstan in May (for an Ibisbill) and Cameroon in June (for a rockfowl). A week's 'vacation' in western Ireland in late July produced the only decent views of a storm petrel (Hydrobatidae) all year, as well as the first skuas. Then after a break from birding in August, the two birders set off on their longest trip of the year: a nine-week round-the-world trip in the Southern Hemisphere, taking in South America and Australasia. This included five days in New Caledonia for the Kagu (Rhynochetidae, the rarest of the world's 22 monotypic families). The last major scheduled trip was to Madagascar and South Africa in the second half of November and early December. All went well, and with the sighting of a Cape Sugarbird (Promeropidae) near Cape Town on 2nd December, Harry and Derek finally achieved their primary goal.

Unfortunately, on returning to England on 6th December, they discovered that Clements, in the 1997 supplement to his checklist, had elevated the Olive Warbler to monotypic family status (Peucedramidae). So within five days, they were off again, this time to the Sierra-Madre Occidental in western Mexico, where the Olive Warbler proved to be easy. They rounded off the year with a quick trip to Switzerland to see a Wallcreeper, not given family status by either Clements or Sibley & Monroe, but placed in the Tichodromadidae by many Old World authors.

By now, they had seen members of all 195 families listed by Clements, the additional seven families recognised by Sibley & Monroe (including the very difficult Sapayoa, still awaiting formal description as a monotypic family), and a further 28 groups of birds that have been given family status by other authors. In the process, they had managed to see a total of 2,676 species of birds of 1,092 genera, or just over a quarter of the species of birds in the world, and just over half of the genera. Harry added over 2,400 species to his life-list, while Derek, who had been birding for over 40 years all over the world, added a respectable 220."

[Anon. (1999): The ultimate twitch. *Birding World* 12(3): 87.]

The following 'new' birds are reported from Chilika Lake, Orissa, in a recent issue of *Bihang Journal*.

Dr Taej Mundkur sighted a Falcated Teal *Anas falcata* during mid December 1998. The species was seen again during the Asian Waterfowl Census.

Dr U N Dev and his team sighted a "large number of Larger Whistling Teals (*Dendrocygna bicolor*)."

H Jena reported the sighting of a White Stork (*Ciconia ciconia*. This bird is supposed to have been seen after a gap of 15 years.

[Anon. (1999): New birds reported in Chilika. *Bihang Journal*. 1(4): 7.]

LETTER FROM AN INSECT-HUNTING ORNITHOLOGIST—25

". . . . . specialized aquatic birds . . . . . consisting of the pelicans and their allies . . . . . range from the size of small ducks to the size of swans. They are the only birds with all four toes connected by webs . . . . . The pelicans are the most unusual in appearance, having long, broad wings. They dive from the air and swim on the surface, fishing. The other species have straight, pointed bills or long bills hooked at the tip. Some dive from the air for their food (tropic birds and boobies), others swim and dive (anhingas and cormorants). The frigate birds have superb powers of flight and parasitic feeding habits robbing other birds without alighting on the water.

"With the stork, heron, ibis, and spoonbill assemblage, we switch from aquatic birds to an order of birds which are specialized for wading but still feed chiefly on animal life. These birds range from pigeon- to goose-sized, and have long bills (with a few exceptions), long necks, long legs, and (again with a few exceptions), long toes . . . A small, highly aberrant subgroup consists of the flamingoes [with] . . . short, webbed toes . . . [they] seem to form somewhat of a link between their own order and the next.

"The ducks and their near relatives, the geese and swans, are included with the screamers in one order . . . . . the ducks and their relations are swimming birds whose habitat—primarily marshy areas—overlaps that of some wading and walking birds . . . . . Vegetable food is important to them . . . . . Some ducks are mostly swimming, diving, and fish-eating birds, while the geese walk on the land and graze on vegetation.

"Now we come to a group of land birds—the hawks and their allies. Few of them walk much, but they fly well, and they perch freely on trees and rocks. They seize their animal prey in their grasping feet, which are armed with sharp, curved claws, and tear it with their short, hooked beak . . . . . Goshawks, kites, buzzards, falcons, eagles and vultures are all included in this order. The vultures have weaker feet than the hawks and have bills adapted for feeding on carrion.

"The cranes, rails and their relatives, like the gallinaceous birds, are chiefly terrestrial and eat both animal and vegetable food. Their powers of flight vary from good to poor; some are flightless . . . . . the bustards, running birds of the plains, are well known representatives of this order; as are the little, quail-like bustard-quail."

[Austin L. Rand, 1967, *Ornithology: An Introduction*, pp. 276-277, 279]

The Order Pelecaniformes includes 6 families of Pelicans, Tropicbirds, Gannets, Boobies, Cormorants, Darters and Frigatebirds. They are oceanic as well as frequent inland waters, both lotic (streams and rivers) and lentic (lakes, ponds, artificial 'tanks' and dam reservoirs), and, except in desert areas, occur all over the world, including Antarctica, totalling some 61 species in 9 genera. The Tropicbirds (*Phaethon* Linnaeus) are represented by 3 species in our region, and the White-tailed (*P. lepturus*) breeds in the Maldives. There are also 3 species of Pelicans (*Pelecanus* Linnaeus) in our area, of which two breed and the Dalmatian (*P. crispus*) winters here. The Boobies (*Sula* Brisson) are also 3 here and all of them are post-breeding visitors to our coasts or islands. Of the 4 Cormorants (*Phalacrocorax* Brisson), the Pygmy (*P. pygmaeus*) was recorded once from Baluchistan, while the others are all resident breeders. The Indian Shag (*P. fuscicollis*) is endemic to our sub-continent, since it extends only to Burma and south to the isthmus of Tenasserim. I believe Burma rightly belongs in the Indian Subregion, its biodiversity derived mainly from this rather than from the Indo-Chinese or Indo-Malayan Subregions of the Oriental Biogeographical Region. The Oriental Darter (*Anhinga* Brisson), *A. melanogaster*, is resident and distributed from India to the Philippines and Celebes (Indonesia). Some 3 Frigatebirds (*Fregata* Lacépède) straggle into Indian waters offshore, and the Least Frigatebird (*F. ariel*) breeds in the Maldive Islands.

The Ciconiiformes, ridiculously expanded by Sibley & Monroe to embrace such diverse land and water birds like sandgrouse and snipe, hawks and shorebirds, storks and petrels, stone curlews and pelicans, gulls and grebes, lapwings and falcons, cormorants and jaçanas, besides sandpipers, painted snipe, plovers, terns, vultures, tropicbirds, egrets, flamingos, frigatebirds, shearwaters and herons, are our next Order. Ripley's Wetmore sequence is more sane, including only storks, herons and flamingos in this group, with 6 families totalling 117 species in 48 genera, distributed all over the world except in the extreme Arctic and in the Sahara—Arabian deserts. Our region has 10 Herons (*Ardea* Linnaeus, *Butorides* Blyth, *Ardeola* Boie, *Nycticorax* T. Forster and *Gorsachius* Bonaparte), 6 Egrets (*Bubulcus* Bonaparte, *Casmerodius* Gloger, *Mesophoyx* Sharpe and *Egretta* T. Forster—too many genera!), 5 Bitterns (*Ixobrychus* Billberg, *Dupetor* Heine & Reichenow and *Botaurus* Stephens), 9 Storks (*Mycteria* Linnaeus, *Anastomus* Bonnaterre, *Ciconia* Brisson, *Ephippiorhynchus* Bonaparte, and *Leptoptilos* Lesson), 3 Ibises (*Threskiornis* G.R. Gray, *Pseudibis* Hodgson and *Plegadis* Kaup—again too many genera?), a single Spoonbill (*Platalea* Linnaeus) and a couple of flamingos (*Phoenicopterus* Linnaeus). All of these are the gypsies of the bird world, nomads which move around in search of their food and nesting sites in their inland aquatic habitats. All are resident except the White Stork (*Ciconia ciconia*) and the Black Stork (*C. nigra*) which winter here, like the Great Bittern (*Botaurus stellaris*). The Goliath Heron (*Ardea goliath*) and Dusky Heron (*A. sumatrana*) are rare vagrants. The Great White-bellied Heron (*Ardea insignis*) is endemic to our region. I also treat the Red-naped Ibis (*Pseudibis papillosa*) as an endemic, since I consider its 'sister-species' (in cladistic terminology) Davison's Ibis (*P. davisoni* Hume) as a distinct, separate, species (like Stuart Baker also does in his NEW FAUNA 6: 317-318; 1929), which is distributed from Burma eastwards into the Indo-Chinese peninsula (see also the ANNOTATED CHECKLIST, p. 105).

Geese, Swans and Ducks, birds of the inland waters, are the Anseriformes, some 148 species (44 genera), grouped in two families, found world-wide except in the Sahara—Arabian deserts. Most of these are migrants to our region from northern Asia, or are accidental vagrants here. All 6 Geese (*Branta* Scopoli, *Anser* Brisson) are winter migrants to our sub-continent but the Bar-headed (*A. indicus*) also breeds in Ladakh. All three Swans of the genus *Cygnus* Bechstein are stragglers in winter. Of our 33 ducks, all species of the genera *Tadorna* von Oken, *Marmaronetta* Reichenbach, *Anas* Linnaeus, *Netta* Kaup, *Aythya* Boie, *Aix* Boie, *Clangula* Leach, *Bucephala* Baird, *Mergellus* Selby, *Mergus* Linnaeus and *Oxyura* Bonaparte are migrants in winter, though some, like the White-eyed Pochard (*Aythya nyroca*), Mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos*), Marbled Teal (*Marmaronetta angustirostris*) and Ruddy Shelduck (*Tadorna ferruginea*) also breed in Ladakh, Kashmir, Baluchistan and Nepal. Our resident ducks belong to the genera *Dendrocygna* Swainson (Lesser and Large

Whistling Teals), *Nettapus* Brandt (Cotton Teal), *Sarkidiornis* Eyton (Comb Duck) and *Cairina* Fleming (White-winged Wood Duck), besides the Grey Teal (*Anas gibberifrons*) in the Andaman Islands and the Spotbill (*A. poecilorhyncha*) all over our sub-continental mainland. One other, once resident duck, the Pink-headed (*Rhodonessa* Reichenbach), *R. caryophyllacea*, is perhaps really extinct, being known from the north-east and down the east coast to the Andhra Pradesh—Tamil Nadu border, with some strays recorded from the Punjab and Maharashtra. This beautiful duck is (or was!) our only endemic of this Order, its genus also being autochthonous here.

Diurnal birds of prey, the hawks, eagles, buzzards, kites, harriers and falcons, besides the vultures that scavenge dead meat, are all grouped in the Order Falconiformes. Sibley & Monroe's placement of these raptors in the Ciconiiformes, along with a motley bunch of diverse bird families, is puzzling and perplexing, and reeks of what I think is phylogenetic uncertainty and 'blind faith' in the DNA-DNA hybridization data. No taxonomist, with the perspicacity and sagacity acquired through years of experience, will foolhardily attempt a phylogenetic sequence largely on one character only. We who have been trained in this difficult and crafty profession of Taxonomy, that uses a vast, constantly increasing, database and investigates all taxa as holistically as is possible, were taught not to give too much 'weight' to a single, even if then seemingly 'new and exciting', characteristic feature or attribute, to investigate relationships and categories of taxa. My advice to amateurs, especially those who have hardly any grounding in taxonomy and how phylogenies are theorized, is to be very wary of sudden changes in the higher classification of any group of animals or plants. In these days, some scientists are quick to use the media to publicize their own work, which they themselves believe is 'revolutionary', and the untrained, gullible, amateurs (or even scientists who are quick to 'jump on the bandwagon' and share the 'limelight') tend to accept these radical theories before other specialists have had time to check them and give their own carefully considered opinions. Taxonomy and nomenclature must principally be used for insights into correct identities and information retrieval, leaving "the phylogenetic fallacy" (fide D.H. Colless, see *Systematic Zoology*, 16: 289-295, 18: 115-124, 134-144; 1967 & 1969) to the 'biosystematists' who attempt to understand relationships, following typological, phenetic, numerical, evolutionary, phylogenetic, cladistic, or biochemical approaches, and using external and internal morphology, chromosomes or biochemistry (alloenzymes, amino acid sequences or DNA-DNA hybridization), besides the biogeography and bioecology, of the organisms involved.

The Falconiformes are presently divided into five families, which embrace a total of some 300 species grouped in 77 genera, and which inhabit the whole world except for interior Greenland and the Antarctic continent. Birds of only three of these families inhabit our region, and these include the Pandionidae, with its single species in the genus *Pandion* Savigny (*P. haliaetus*) which links the bigger sized Accipitridae (hawks, eagles, Old World vultures) and the smaller Falconidae (falcons). Sibley & Monroe, however, now place *Pandion* in the Accipitridae. We have in our region 2 species of Bazas (*Aviceda* Swainson), 5 Kites (*Elanus* Savigny, *Milvus* Lacépède, *Haliastur* Selby), 7 Buzzards (*Pernis* Cuvier, iLacépède, *Butastur* Hodgson), 8 Hawks (*Accipiter* Brisson), 24 Eagles (*Spizaetus* Vieillot, *Hieraaetus* Kaup, *Aquila* Brisson, *Ictinaetus* Blyth, *Haliaeetus* Savigny, *Ichthyophaga* Lesson, *Circaetus* Vieillot, *Spilornis* G.R. Gray), 8 Vultures (*Sarcogyps* Lesson, *Aegypius* Savigny, *Gyps* Savigny, *Neophron* Savigny, *Gypaetus* Storr), 6 Harriers (*Circus* Lacépède), 2 Falconets (*Microhierax* Sharpe), and 15 Falcons, Hobbies, Merlins and Kestrels (*Falco* Linnaeus). The ten endemics in our region are the Nicobars Sparrow Hawk (*Accipiter butleri*), White-eyed Buzzard-Eagle (*Butastur teesa*), Tytler's Hawk-Eagle (*Spizaetus andamanensis*), Crested Hawk-Eagle (*S. cirrhatus*), Franklin's Eagle (*Aquila vindhiana*—which had been misidentified earlier as '*A. rapax*', the Tawny Eagle, in our sub-continent), the Nicobars, Hume's and Blyth's Serpent Eagles (*Spilornis minimus*, *S. davisoni*, *S. elgini*), the Laggar Falcon (*Falco jugger*), and Baker's Kestrel (*F. objurgatus*).

The Gruiformes include terrestrial birds, some of which are associated with aquatic ecosystems and habitats. A dozen families hold the 184 species, in 48 genera, found all over the globe except in the Sahara—Arabian deserts and a large part of the north temperate and Arctic regions. Sibley & Monroe place the Turnicidae (Button and Bustard-Quails) in a separate Order, the Turniciformes! Besides the Sarus Crane (*Grus antigone*), all other 5 cranes (*Grus* Pallas) are winter visitors to our area. The 4 Bustards (*Otis* Linnaeus, *Tetrax* T. Forster, *Ardeotis* Le Maout, *Chlamydotis* Lesson) also visit us in winter, and the endemic Great Indian Bustard (*Ardeotis nigriceps*) which is a breeding resident, now threatened and restricted to some suitable arid and semi-arid tracts in India. Both Floricans (*Houbaropsis* Sharpe and *Sypheotides* Lesson) are also endemics, and the latter genus, for the Likh (or Lesser) Florican, being autochthonous to our region as well. The 3 Button Quails (*Turnix* Bonnaterre) are all residents, but also migrate locally. The other members of this Order, that are attached to aquatic habitats, are the 2 Rails (*Rallus* Linnaeus, *Gallirallus* Lafresnaye), 10 Crakes and a Waterhen (*Rallina* G.R.Gray, *Crex* Bechstein, *Porzana* Vieillot, *Amaurornis* Reichenbach), 1 Watercock (*Gallicrex* Blyth), 2 Moorhens (*Gallinula* Brisson, *Porphyrio* Brisson), 1 Coot (*Fulica* Linnaeus), and a Finfoot (*Heliopais* Sharpe). The Andamans Banded Crake (*Rallina canningi*) is the only other endemic in our region.

--- **Dr Kumar Ghorpadé**, P.O. Box 8439, Bangalore 560 084 & e-mail: varanus.kg@mailcity.com

CONTACT CALLS

"One of my junior officers brought a bagful of quails. Luckily before his departure, the so-called quails were examined and to our utmost surprise, the quails were in fact **Large Grey Babblers *Turdoides malcolmi***, tied in bunches by (their) legs. Their tail feathers were pulled out and wings broken. Birds were photographed (copy enclosed) and later released in bushes. It is now very common to see these birds being sold and served as quails, which the customer relish ignorantly. Such being the situation, how the species can be expected to survive as no helping hands are coming forward for the purpose." — A.M.K. Bharos, Raipur, Raipur district, Madhya Pradesh.
[Editors' note: Euthanasia would have been better.**]**

INTERIM RESULTS OF SOCIETY'S BIRD SURVEYS OF 'PROTECTED AREAS' IN THE HYDERABAD REGION

Compiled by K C Ramakrishnan & Humayun Taher

The following is a summary of the data collected by various teams in their respective areas. No conclusions can be drawn from the data as all sites were not covered diligently—as seen from item number 5 of Table 1. A detailed Interim Report has been prepared and circulated to all participants. Members interested in going through the report can do so at the Indoor Meeting on 17.v.1999.

Special mention may be made of the sighting of a Brooks's Flycatcher *Cyornis poltogenys* that was sighted on 14.ii.1999 at Nehru Zoological Park. This species has been reported from the Eastern Ghats in Andhra Pradesh. Indian Moorhens *Gallinula chloropus* were observed breeding throughout the observation period in Nehru Zoological Park. On every visit the team discovered a new family! Vultures were not seen at all in Shamirpet, an area where they were seen regularly earlier.

TABLE 1: SUMMARY OF OBSERVATIONS

Serial No.	Criteria	Gardens (3)	Semi-wilderness (5)
1	Total number of species	99	114
2	Number of migratory species	22	20
3	Number of breeding species	22	13
4	Average number of species seen per trip	33	30
5	Percentage of trips made to sites	89%	49%

TABLE 2: COMPARISON OF BREEDING AND MIGRATORY BIRDS IN THE TWO HABITATS

Serial No.	Species	Breeding Birds		Migratory Birds	
		Gardens	Semi-wilderness	Gardens	Semi-wilderness
1	Babbler, Large Grey	X			
2	Babbler, Whiteheaded	X			
3	Barbet, Crimsonbreasted	X			
4	Baya	X			
5	Bee-eater, Bluetailed				X
6	Bulbul, Redvented		X		
7	Chiffchaff				X
8	Coot	X			
9	Cormorant, Little	X			
10	Crow, House		X		
11	Dove, Little Brown		X		
12	Dove, Spotted	X	X		
13	Drongo, Grey			X	
14	Drongo, Whitebellied			X	
15	Duck, Spotbill	X	X		
16	Eagle, Booted			X	
17	Egret, Little	X			
18	Flycatcher, Brooks's			X	
19	Flycatcher, Brown			X	
20	Flycatcher, Redbreasted			X	X
21	Grebe, Little	X			
22	Greenshank			X	
23	Harrier, Marsh			X	
24	Harrier, Pallid				X
25	Heron, Pond	X			
26	Kestrel				X
27	Kite, Blackeared			X	
28	Kite, Brahminy		X		
29	Kite, Pariah	X			
30	Lapwing, Redwattled	X			
31	Moorhen, Indian	X	X		
32	Moorhen, Purple	X			
33	Munia, Spotted		X		
34	Munia, Whitethroated		X		
35	Parakeet, Blossomheaded	X			
36	Parakeet, Roseringed	X			
37	Pintail			X	
38	Pipit, Tree			X	X
39	Redstart, Black			X	X

40	Rosy Pastor			X	X
41	Sandpiper, Common			X	X
42	Sandpiper, Green			X	
43	Sandpiper, Spotted			X	X
44	Shikra	X	X		
45	Shoveller			X	X
46	Shrike, Brown				X
47	Sunbird, Purple		X		
48	Sunbird, Purplerumped	X			
49	Swallow, Common			X	X
50	Tailor Bird		X		
51	Teal, Lesser Whistling	X			
52	Thrush, Blue Rock				X
53	Wagtail, Grey			X	X
54	Wagtail, Large Pied	X			
55	Wagtail, White			X	
56	Wagtail, Yellow			X	
57	Warbler, Blyth's Reed			X	X
58	Warbler, Franklin's Wren-		X		
59	Warbler, Greenish				X
60	Warbler, Orphean				X
61	Warbler, Tickell's Leaf				X
62	Waterhen, Whitebreasted	X			
63	Whitethroat, Lesser				X

BIRDING NOTES Compiled by Aasheesh Pittie

This column publishes birding notes in brief telegraphic form, from **Andhra Pradesh, Goa, Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra & Tamil Nadu** on interesting and significant sightings and behaviour like breeding, feeding, migration, nesting, etc. Notes on flowering and fruiting trees and their relationship with birds are also welcome. English names and classification follow, S.D. Ripley's *A Synopsis of the Birds of India and Pakistan* (1982, 2nd ed.) and scientific nomenclature, T. Inskipp, N. Lindsey & W. Duckworth's *An Annotated Checklist of the Birds of the Oriental Region* (1996). Unless specified, all observations are for 1999. Abbreviations, Contributors, Notes, Regional Referees, *etc.*, are at the end. For selection of breeding criteria 'Probable, Possible, Confirmed', see *Pitta* # 82, February 1998, p. 4.

KARNATAKA

CHIKMAGALUR DISTRICT 19.4 (JNP)

Chikmagalur

LITTLE EGRET PRB, 6 pairs courting and looking for N sites; NIGHT HERON PRB, 28 N under const., on *Ficus religiosa* tree. Matl brought from a tank 1km away. 1 pair mating; INDIAN MYNA POB, Pair searching for N site on same tree as the Magpie-Robin in this note; JUNGLE MYNA CB, Seen carrying a tissue paper to its N; MAGPIE-ROBIN PRB, N being const., 10m up in Coconut palm. F brings grass rootlets from quite a distance. M singing regularly from close by electric pole.

Kaimara 19.4 (DVG)

GREYHEADED MYNA race *blythii* CB, Ad., carrying food in bill, to a tree hole, on a coffee estate.

Mattavara 13.3 (PKD)

RUFOUS TURTLE-DOVE CB, N with 2 eggs, 1' above ground in a roadside *Zizyphus* sp. bush.

Sringeri 18.4 (JNP)

INDIAN MYNA PRB, seen mating; JUNGLE MYNA PRB, const., N in a hole under eaves.

TAMIL NADU

NILGIRIS DISTRICT 22-24.3 (AM)

Mudumalai Wildlife Sanctuary

GREEN PIGEON PRB, carrying N-matl; ROLLER POB, Suspected nesting in hole 6m up roadside tree; COPPERSMITH CB, Ad., feeding yng in hole *c.* 20m up in dead tree; HILL MYNA PRB, Carrying twigs to hollow, 15m up in *Terminalia crenulata* tree.

ABBREVIATIONS: Ab-abundant; ad-adult/s; br-breeding; C-common/ly; CB-confirmed breeding; const-construction/ing; *c.*-approximately; disp-display/ing; F-female; flt-flight; fly-family; freq-frequent/ly; hrd-heard; id-identify/ied; imm-immature; inc-include/ing; Is-Island; juv-juvenile; LM-local migrant; M-male; mat-material; N-nest/ing/s; POB-possible breeding; PRB-probable breeding; plm-plumage; RF-Reserve Forest; Resp-respectively; Tlk-Taluk; vil-village; WL-wildlife; yng-young.

CONTRIBUTORS: A Madhusudan (AM); DV Girish (DVG); JN Prasad (JNP); PK Dinesh (PKD);

REGIONAL REFEREES: Andhra Pradesh: A Pittie; Goa: H Lainer; Karnataka: JN Prasad; Kerala: PO Nameer; Maharashtra: N Jamdar; Tamil Nadu: V Santharam.

For Private Circulation Only

For more information, write to: Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh, PO Box 45, Banjara Hills PO, Hyderabad 500034, India.
Editors: Aasheesh Pittie (3350683) & Siraj A Taher (3352607) **E-mail**: AASHEESH@HD1.VSNL.NET.IN
Membership (Rs): Admission=20; Ordinary=100, Student=25 per annum; Life=1,000. *Outstation cheques not accepted.*
Illustration: Page 2; Dr S Subramanya.

PITTA

Bulletin of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh No. 98 : June 1999

4/VI/199

PROGRAMME Indexed 14-2-2001

FIELD OUTING: 13-6-1999: Mahavir Harin Vanasthali, Hyderabad: Members are requested to assemble near ticket hut, by 7.30am. This will be a half-day trip.

INDOOR MEETING: 21-6-1999, 6 p.m.: Slide show on Kanha National Park by Aasheesh Pittie. Vidyaranya High School, Opp., Secretariat, Saifabad, Hyderabad 500004.

NOTES & NEWS

New Species!

INDIA A new population of pheasants similar to the vulnerable **Sclater's Monal** ***Lophophorus sclateri*** but with an all white tail has recently been discovered in Arunachal Pradesh. Work is in progress to determine the status of this probable new taxon. [*World Birdwatch* 21(1)/*Tragopan* 9]

INDONESIA a new species, **Sangihe Scops Owl** ***Otus collari***, has been described from the island of Sangihe (situated between Sulawesi and the Philippine island of Mindanao). It seems to be quite common and widespread on the island and has been named in honour of Dr Nigel Collar, Research Fellow at BirdLife International (*Bull. BOC* 118: 204-217).

PERU A new species, **Black-spectacled Brush-finch** ***Atlapetes melanops***, has been described from the eastern Andes of central Peru; it occurs in humid scrub and probably has a very restricted range (*Ibis* 141: 194-198).

SOUTH AFRICA A newly recognised species, **Barlow's Lark** ***Certhilauda barlowi***, has been described from the area of the Orange River mouth (*Ibis* 140: 605-619).

VIETNAM A new species, **Black-crowned Barwing** ***Actinodura sodangorum***, has been described from the montane evergreen forest of the Central Highlands; it is most closely related to Spectacled Barwing *A. ramsayi* (*Ibis* 141: 1-10). Another new species,**Golden-winged Laughingthrush** ***Garrulax ngoclinensis***, has been described from the Western highlands; it is a striking bird most closely related to Chestnut-crowned Laughingthrush *G. erythrocephalus* and Collared Laughingthrush *G. yersini* (*Bull. BOC* 119: 4-15). [Anon (1999): World news. *Birding World* 12(4): 168.]

1998 World Bird Count Event

World-wide the 4th NTT World Bird Count participants reported an astonishing total of 5,744 species in 94 countries and more than 112,000 people took part in the event.

For the first time ever more than half the number of records submitted came in by e-mail, and the numbers reporting through the Internet Home page jumped from 9% in 1997 to 21% in 1998. As expected, reports submitted by older forms of communication contiued to fall, with just 20% of records arriving by fax (32% in 1997) and 5% by phone (10% in 1997). Good coverage of the world was achieved and encouragingly several of the new countries participating in the event were in the Middle East and Africa, the two areas least represented in previous NTT World bird Counts.

The top ten countries in terms of numbers of species reported included six from the Americas, including Brazil with the highest total recorded of 811, and the remainder were South Africa (734), Australia (596), Zambia (535) and Ethiopia (518). In the Americas both the annual World Birdwatch and NTT World Bird Count events took place and both were a great success, thanks to the superb coordinating job of Mónica Rivas in Quito. More than 100 organisations from 21 countries in the Americas and the Caribbean participated and, for the first time, there were reports from Guatemala and Curacao. Several rare bird species were sighted, including Yellow Cardinal *Gubernatrix cristata* and Strange-tailed Tyrant *Alectrurus risora*. [Anon. (1999): 1998 World Bird Count event. *BirdLife Update*. April 1999: 1.]

[Editors' Note: The coordinator of the annual national-event— **Sálim Ali Bird Count**— the Bombay Natural History Society, has not published any data about the event up till now. A beginning could perhaps be made on the lines of the above quote, in the form of a letter to all participants!]

Vulture News

Following Dr Asad R Rahmani's national alert regarding the disappearance of vultures in India (see *Pitta* # 92, December 1998, p. 1), a letter and a photograph by J K Tiwari (Gujarat), have been published in the Letters column of *Down To Earth* [May 15, 1999. 7(24): 2]. The photograph shows half a dozen dead vultures near a carcass, in graphic and chilling clarity. Tiwari states, "Observations about the decline in the population of vultures are correct and also alarming. Not only vultures, but insectivorous birds like warblers, pipits, chats, robins and many such species are succumbing to heavy doses of the insecticides being sprayed by our farmers." He informs that the vultures in the picture "**died on the spot after consuming the flesh of a dead cow** (Editors' emphasis). This happened near the Motivirani village of Kutch district. I have seen dead falcons near fields on many occasions. The decline in their numbers is due to poisoning of their food, poaching and habitat destruction. Other species too, fall prey to the misuse of insecticides. I have come across unhatched clutches of Raptors like the Tawny Eagles and White-eyed Buzzards. The thinning of egg-shells and infertility is also caused by the insecticide in their food chains." India's Green Revolution and the subsequent yin-yang of depleting soil quality-increasing demand for food-grains, is taking us towards a Silent Spring at breathtaking speed. The effort to halt this debacle will involve a herculean effort of cooperation and willingness between scientists-bureaucrats-

politicians. The poignant writing is on the wall. It is time we heeded nature's indicators that are pointing towards an earth beleaguered with environmental problems.

Wings May Have Evolved to Increase Running Speed

The ancestors of birds may have evolved wings not for flying but for running faster, researchers reported today in the journal *Nature* in a study that may answer a key question about the origin of flight.

Many scientists believe birds descended from two-legged dinosaurs like *Velociraptor*, featured in "Jurassic Park." The problem has been explaining how the clawed dinosaur forelimbs developed into the wings of the first known bird, *Archaeopteryx*, which lived 140 million to 150 million years ago.

Some of these dinosaurs must have had limbs that resembled wings, but not enough to allow them to fly. If they couldn't fly with them, why have wings?

Paleontologist Luis Chiappe of the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County and aerodynamic engineer Phillip Burger of the San Diego Natural History Museum think they have found the answer.

They believe the crow-sized *Archaeopteryx* took off from the ground. But it appeared too weak to launch itself from a standing start, as most modern birds can, and too slow to gain lift from just running.

So how did it get into the air? In their study, Chiappe and Burger calculate that *Archaeopteryx* could almost quadruple its running speed with thrust from flapping its wings.

They estimate that with a runway of 10 to 15 yards, it could achieve the 18 mph takeoff speed in about three seconds.

Flightless ancestors of *Archaeopteryx* could have used rudimentary wings to speed up when chasing prey or escaping predators, Chiappe said.

However, the theory does not fly with paleo-ornithologist Larry Martin of the University of Kansas at Lawrence.

"If you could increase your ground speed by flapping your wings, then I suppose birds that run on the ground would do this. As far as I know, there is no modern bird that flaps its wings to increase its ground speed," he said.

"I grew up on a farm. I've chased chickens. I know that when they get their wings out, it's about when they're ready to fall—they use it as balance. But I've never seen one flap its wings with the idea of increasing its speed."

Chiappe disagreed.

"If you go to a chicken farm and chase a chicken very closely, the chicken will start flapping its wings and it will run faster," he said.

Martin and some other scientists favor the idea that *Archaeopteryx* and its immediate ancestors lived in trees and started flying by jumping off branches. The wings of its predecessors, if not good enough for flying, could have helped in gliding. [AP. *The New York Times*: 6-MAY-99]

Protected Foxes Killed to Protect Rare Bird Closer to Extinction

LOS ANGELES (AP)—The Navy is killing protected foxes on a coastal island to save an even rarer species—the San Clemente loggerhead shrike—a tiny bird that is being eaten into extinction in the wild.

Only 13 shrikes are known to exist outside of captivity, and those are in danger of being devoured by the San Clemente Island foxes, of which there are about 800. Thirteen of the foxes that showed a tendency to venture into shrike territory were killed this spring by injection.

The Navy, which owns San Clemente Island, said it had to act because the shrike is on the federal endangered species list, which supersedes the state-protected fox.

"There is a lot of talk about which one do you want to protect," Navy spokesman Ken Mitchell said. "What it comes down to is the fox is a state-protected species, and that is one step below an endangered species."

The shrike, about the size of a robin with a white underbelly, gray top and a black "burglar's mask" across its eyes, is exclusive to San Clemente Island, the most southerly and fourth largest of California's eight Channel Islands.

The Navy is responsible for the birds because it owns the property, Mitchell said.

This year the Navy spent $2.3 million trying to save the birds, electronically guarding wild nests, raising some birds in captivity and killing other predators such as rats, wild cats and raptors.

Last year, efforts to stun the foxes with electric shock collars when they approached trees where shrikes live failed to dissuade enough of the furry predators.

The Navy had plans to kill up to 50 foxes a year using a "two strikes" rule. Foxes that cross the shock collar's electrical barrier more than once were to be executed. The program is temporarily on hold while scientists decide whether it is necessary to eliminate more foxes.

But more foxes may be killed later this spring when shrike fledglings emerge from their nests and are most vulnerable. Scientists also may trap foxes found within the shrikes' nesting area and release them after the young birds mature.

Though Navy SEALS occasionally practice storming the beaches and warships lob explosive shells and cruise missiles onto the island, Mitchell said there is no conflict between its training missions and the island's ecological survival.

San Clemente Island, off the Southern California coast and about 60 miles northwest of San Diego, is home to 10 federally listed rare plants and animals. Another 28 species are being considered for listing. [AP (CNN): 17-MAY-99]

Readers are requested to note Dr Kumar Ghorpadé's new address at the bottom of his **Letter** and, send completed Questionnaires of the Directory of Indian Birdwatchers there.

Crimsonbreasted Barbet *Megalaima haemacephala*

LETTER FROM AN INSECT-HUNTING ORNITHOLOGIST—26

"The cranes, rails and their relatives, like the gallinaceous birds, are chiefly territorial and eat both animal and vegetable food. Their powers of flight vary from good to poor; some are flightless . . . . . the bustards, running birds of the plains, are well known representatives of this order; as are the little, quail-like bustard-quail.

"The shorebird, gull, and auk assemblage has four main groups. The shorebirds, sparrow- to fowl-sized, include sandpipers and plovers, and are chiefly walking and running birds with good powers of flight; their home is the edge of the water. The gulls, terns, and skuas are aerial water-feeders with webbed feet and long, narrow wings . . . . . The jacanas resemble rails and live in the marshes.

"The pigeons, seed and fruit eaters, are well typified by the domestic pigeons of our city parks. They range from the size of thrushes to the size of small turkeys. Some are mostly arboreal and have very short legs, but some have longer legs and spend much time walking on the ground. Included in this order are the sandgrouse, which . . . . . somewhat resemble grouse. They live in dry, open country and have small feet and pointed wings.

"Usually placed next to the pigeons are the seed-and fruit-eating parrots, macaws, cockatoos, lories, and their close relatives. The stout, hooked bill and grasping feet, well known from caged species, characterise all members of this compact, species-rich group. Most of them are tree birds and they range from sparrow- to raven-sized.

"Some of the cuckoos are tree birds with short legs; others are walking birds with longer legs. Both have two toes in front and two behind. They range from sparrow- to fowl-sized . . . . . Some specialize in animal food, but others are fruit eaters.

"The owls are the nocturnal birds of prey, the ecological equivalent of the hawks, the diurnal birds of prey. Owls' hooked bills and sharp claws are quite hawklike but the disklike feathering around their eyes and their soft, fluffy feathers give them a distinctive appearance.

"In the next order, the nightjars and their relatives, we find nocturnal birds which resemble owls in that they are mottled and barred in soft browns, grays, and black, and have large eyes. The frogmouths . . . . . are perching tree birds. They have very small feet and a short bill more or less hooked and with a very wide gape, and are somewhat owl-like in appearance if not in habits. The nightjars, while similar, have weaker bills and longer wings and feed on the wing, catching insects.

"The most aerial of all birds are the swifts, and included with them in the same order are the hummingbirds. The swifts' bill is reduced to a little more than a narrow rim around a wide gape, and they have long feet and long, narrow wings. Swifts are aerial feeders *par excellence*, gleaning insects from the air, and an ecological equivalent of the nightjars and the swallows.

"The trogons, of pantropical distribution, form a distinct order of medium-sized tropical birds with beautiful colours, rather long tails and short legs with the inner toe turned backward so that the bird has two toes in front and two toes behind. The bill is short and stout but has a wide gape, and the birds feed on fruits and insects." [Austin L. Rand, 1967, *Ornithology: An Introduction*, pp. 277-280]

The Gruiformes include terrestrial birds, some of which are associated with aquatic ecosystems and habitats. A dozen families hold the 184 species, in 48 genera, found all over the globe except in Antarctica, the Sahara—Arabian deserts and large parts of the north temperate and arctic regions. Sibley & Monroe place the Turnicidae (Button- and Bustard-Quails) in a separate Order, the Turniciformes! Unlike the Sarus Crane (*Grus antigone*), the other 5 Cranes (*Grus* Pallas) are winter visitors to our area. Three Bustards (*Otis* Linnaeus, *Tetrax* T. Forster, *Chlamydotis* Lesson) also visit us in winter, and the endemic Great Indian Bustard (*Ardeotis* Le Maout), *Ardeotis nigriceps*, is a breeding resident, now threatened and restricted to some suitable arid and semi-arid tracts in India. Both Floricans (*Houbaropsis* Sharpe and *Sypheotides* Lesson) are also endemics, and the latter genus, for the Likh (or Lesser) Florican, being autochthonous to our region as well. The 3 Button-Quails (*Turnix* Bonnaterre) are all residents, but also migrate locally. The other members of this Order, that are residents and attached to aquatic habitats, are the 2 Rails (*Rallus* Linnaeus, *Gallirallus* Lafresnaye), 10 Crakes and a Waterhen (*Rallina* G.R. Gray, *Crex* Bechstein, *Porzana* Vieillot, *Amaurornis* Reichenbach), 1 Watercock (*Gallicrex* Blyth), 2 Moorhens (*Gallinula* Brisson, *Porphyrio* Brisson), 1 Coot (*Fulica* Linnaeus), and a Finfoot (*Heliopais* Sharpe). The Andaman Banded Crake (*Rallina canningi*) is the only other endemic in our region, one Crake (*Crex crex*) is a vagrant and two others (*Porzana porzana*, *P. parva*) are winter visitors here.

The Charadriiformes, is the largest non-Passeriformes taxon in our region, with 118 species (41 genera). The world fauna is placed in 16 families, comprising a total of 332 species in 88 genera, distributed world-wide, including Antarctica, save the Sahara Desert. Almost all species, except the Coursers, some Lapwings, and the Stone Curlew, are found near inland or coastal waters and these are both breeding residents and/or winter migrants too. These 'water birds' in our region are 2 Jaçanas (*Hydrophasianus* Wagler, *Metopidius* Wagler), 1 Oystercatcher (*Haematopus* Linnaeus), 13 Plovers (*Pluvialis* Brisson, *Charadrius* Linnaeus, *Elseyornis* Mathews), a Whimbrel and a Curlew (*Numenius* Brisson), 2 Godwits (*Limosa* Brisson), 9 Sandpipers including Redshanks and Greenshanks (*Tringa* Linnaeus, *Xenus* Kaup, *Actitis* Illiger), 1 Turnstone (*Arenaria* Brisson), 2 Dowitchers (*Limnodromus* Wied-Neuwied), 7 Snipe (*Gallinago* Brisson, *Lymnocryptes* Kaup), 1 Woodcock (*Scolopax* Linnaeus), 1 Painted Snipe (*Rostratula* Vieillot), 2 Knots, 1 Sanderling, 4 Stints, 4 other Sandpipers, 1 Dunlin and a Curlew-Sandpiper (*Calidris* Merrem, *Limicola* Koch, *Tryngites* Cabanis), a Ruff-Reeve (*Philomachus* Merrem), 2 Phalaropes (*Phalaropus* Brisson), 1 Stilt (*Himantopus* Brisson) [or 2 or 3? Whistler's *H. ceylonensis*, apparently resident and confined to this island, and the Australian and Philippine—Indonesian *H. leucocephalus* could possibly be distinct species (*contra* Inskipp et al., 1996: 84)], 1 Avocet (*Recurvirostra* Linnaeus), 1 Ibisbill (*Ibidorhyncha* Vigors), 1 Crab Plover (*Dromas* Paykull), and 2 Stone Plovers (*Esacus* Lesson). Of these, the Ceylon Plover (*Charadrius seebohmi*) and the Wood Snipe (*Gallinago nemoricola*) are endemic to our region. There are also 2 Skuas (*Catharacta* Brünnich), 3 Jaegers (*Stercorarius* Brisson), 12 Gulls (*Larus* Linnaeus), 20 terns (*Chlidonias* Rafinesque, *Gelochelidon* Brehm, *Sterna* Linnaeus, *Gygis* Wagler), 3 Noddies (*Anous* Stephens), and a Skimmer (*Rynchops* Linnaeus). The land birds not especially attached to aquatic habitats are the single Stone Curlew (*Burhinus* Illiger), 3 Coursers (*Cursorius* Latham, *Rhinoptilus* Strickland), 7 Lapwings (*Vanellus* Brisson), and 3 Pratincoles (*Glareola* Brisson), though the two latter bird groups usually also frequent inland waters like *jheels*, tanks, marshland environs, riverbanks and their floodplains. Our endemics are the Yellow-wattled Lapwing (*Vanellus malabaricus*), the Indian Courser (*Cursorius coromandelicus*), and Jerdon's Courser (*Rhinoptilus bitorquatus*), the latter genus also autochthonous here.

Pigeons, Doves and Sandgrouse belong to the Columbiformes, and these are arranged in two families with 313 species (41 genera), distributed all over the world except in the north temperate coniferous forests and the arctic tundra, besides Antarctica as well. In our region, 9 species of Sandgrouse occur (*Syrrhaptes* Illiger, *Pterocles* Temminck), besides 25 Pigeons (*Treron* Vieillot, *Ducula* Hodgson, *Columba* Linnaeus, *Caloenas* G.R. Gray), and 10 Doves (*Macropygia* Swainson, *Streptopelia* Bonaparte, *Chalcophaps* Gould). Ten species are endemic here — Painted Sandgrouse (*Pterocles indicus*), the Pompadour, Grey-fronted, Blyth's and Bay Islands Green Pigeons (*Treron pompadora*, *T. affinis*, *T. phayrei*, *T. chloroptera*), Jerdon's Imperial Pigeon (*Ducula badia*), the Nilgiris, Ceylon and Hume's Wood Pigeons (*Columba elphinstonii*, *C. torringtoni*, *C. palumboides*), Blyth's Cuckoo-Dove (*Macropygia rufipennis*), and the Red-crowned Turtle Dove (*Streptopelia erythrocephala*). Sibley & Monroe place the Pteroclididae (Sandgrouse) in the Order Ciconiiformes (!), which latter includes herons, egrets, bitterns, storks, ibises, spoonbill and flamingos in our sub-continent, birds with long legs and bills, aquatic habitats, and fish or other freshwater animals as their prime food!

The Psittaciformes are the familiar Parrots (only Parakeets and Lorikeets in our region), with only one of 3 families in our sub-continent, a total of 331 world species, placed in 76 genera. These birds are mainly tropical in distribution, absent from the northern hemisphere temperate areas, besides the southern tips of the South American and African continents, the Sahara—Arabian deserts, Antarctica, and, very curiously, from the island of Formosa (= Taiwan) as well. In our region, 13 Parakeets (*Psittacula* Cuvier) and 2 Lorikeets (*Loriculus* Blyth), all residents, occur, of which the following 7 species are endemic here — Blyth's Parakeet (*Psittacula caniceps*), Blossom-headed Parakeet (*P. cyanocephala*), Rothschild's Parakeet (*P. intermedia* — considered not distinct, a 'hybrid', by some authorities), Slaty-headed Parakeet (*P. himalayana*), Blue-winged Parakeet (*P. columboides*), Layard's Parakeet (*P. calthropae*), and the Ceylon Lorikeet (*Loriculus beryllinus*).

Cuckoos and their relatives are classified in the Cuculiformes, which has two families; only one, the Cuculidae, found in our region. There are 146 species in 47 genera distributed all over the world, except in the northern most temperate and arctic areas, the Sahara—Arabian deserts and southern South America, besides Antarctica, of course. We have 15 species of mostly resident Cuckoos (*Clamator* Kaup, *Hierococcyx* S. Müller, *Cuculus* Linnaeus, *Cacomantis* S. Müller, *Chrysococcyx* Boie, *Surniculus* Lesson), a Koel (*Eudynamys* Vigors & Horsfield), 4 Malkohas (*Phaenicophaeus* Stephens) and 4 Coucals (*Centropus* Illiger). Seven of these are endemic in our sub-continent — the Brainfever Hawk-Cuckoo (*Hierococcyx varius*), Plaintive Cuckoo (*Cacomantis passerinus*), the Blue-faced, Sirkeer, and Red-faced Malkohas (*Phaenicophaeus viridirostris*, *P. leschenaultii*, *P. pyrrhocephalus*), and the Brown and Ceylon Coucals (*Centropus andamanensis*, *C. chlororhynchus*).

The animal killers of the night, the Owls, belong to the Strigiformes, whose two families also occur in the Indian region, with mostly resident species here. There are 147 known species (30 genera) occurring in every part of the earth, except in large areas of Greenland and Antarctica. There are single species of Barn and Grass Owls (*Tyto* Billberg), and also a Bay Owl (*Phodilus* G. Saint-Hilaire), 7 Scops Owls (*Otus* Pennant), 4 Eagle-Owls and Horned Owls (*Bubo* Duméril), 3 Fishing Owls (*Ketupa* Lesson), a straggler Snowy Owl (*Nyctea* Stephens), 4 Jungle Owlets (*Glaucidium* Boie), 3 Hawk-Owls (*Ninox* Hodgson), 2 Little Owls (*Athene* Boie), 5 Wood Owls (*Heteroglaux* Hume, *Strix* Linnaeus), 2 mainly wintering Eared Owls (*Asio* Brisson), and 1 Boreal Owl (*Aegolius* Kaup). Of these 35 species of Owls, the following 9 are endemic here — Andamans Scops owl (*Otus balli*), Abdulali's Scops Owl (*O. alius* — described last year from the Nicobars), Great Horned Owl (*Bubo bengalensis*), Jungle Owlet (*Glaucidium radiatum*), Chestnut-backed Owlet (*G. castanonotum*), Hume's Hawk-Owl (*Ninox obscura*), Beavan's Hawk-Owl (*N. affinis*), Blewitt's Wood Owl (*Heteroglaux blewitti* — the genus also autochthonous here), and the Mottled Wood Owl (*Strix ocellata*).

The Caprimulgiformes are a closely related group to the above (Sibley & Monroe lump them in a single Order, Strigiformes!), possessing five families (two occur in our area) and 102 species in 24 genera, found all over the world except in Antarctica, on many oceanic islands, in New Zealand, western Sahara and the Arabian deserts, the temperate tip of South America, the northern coniferous forests, and the arctic tundra. There are two species of Frogmouths (*Batrachostomus* Gould) in our region, besides a single Eared Nightjar (*Eurostopodus* Gould), and 8 other Nightjars (*Caprimulgus* Linnaeus) that are mostly resident but partly migratory as well. The endemics are Blyth's Frogmouth (*Batrachostomus moniliger*), Sykes' Nightjar (*Caprimulgus mahrattensis*), and Jerdon's Nightjar (*C. atripennis*). Sibley & Monroe treat *Eurostopodus* in a separate family, the Eurostopodidae!

The Swifts are grouped in the Apodiformes, with three families. The Trochilidae, containing the Hummingbirds, constitute a majority of the 417 species and 133 genera of this Order, but they are New World (the Americas) in distribution. The Apodidae (Swifts) and Hemiprocnidae (Tree Swifts) occur everywhere, except extreme north temperate and arctic areas, almost all of Australia, New Zealand, Tasmania, most of the Sahara—Arabian deserts and the southern areas of the South American continent. It may be noted here that Antarctica, and many of the oceanic islands distant from continents, have no (or limited) representatives of most bird Orders. Also, that apart from the Irenidae (Fairy Bluebirds, Chloropses and Ioras, the last being placed in the Corvidae by Sibley & Monroe as a distinct Subfamily Aegithininae!), the Hemiprocnidae is also a family that is restricted to the Oriental Region, extending east to New Guinea and the Solomon islands which Gressitt (1956, *Systematic Zoology* 5: 11-32, 47, *et seq.*) rightly treated as its Papuan Subregion. Our Indian region has 5 Swiftlets (*Collocalia* G.R. Gray), 13 Swifts (*Hirundapus* Hodgson, *Zoonavena* Mathews, *Tachymarptis* Roberts, *Apus* Scopoli, *Cypsiurus* Lesson), and 1 Tree Swift (*Hemiprocne* Nitzsch), all except one being resident here. Four of these are our endemics — Jerdon's Edible-nest Swiftlet (*Collocalia unicolor*), White-rumped Spinetail Swift (*Zoonavena sylvatica*), Dark-rumped Swift (*Apus acuticauda*), and the Ceylon Black Swift (*A. singalensis*).

The Trogoniformes include the beautiful Trogons, some 37 species (8 genera) known from the tropical jungles of the Americas, Africa (also extending down its south-eastern coast but absent in Madagascar island), and South and South-east Asia to 'Wallace's Line' (Philippines, Borneo and Java but not Celebes, the Lesser Sundas and the Moluccas eastward, and curiously not in Formosa either). Fossil Frogmouths have been discovered in France, indicating that southern Europe was once covered with tropical forest. Three species of Trogons (*Harpactes* Swainson) are resident in our region, discontinuously (?) — on the Western Ghats and the island of Ceylon, and then from Andhra Pradesh (Nallamalais, Amrabad Plateau, Vizag Hills) north-eastwards — so, this present restricted range of Trogons in our sub-continent is recent and evidently caused by loss of suitable habitat through natural or man-made events.

— **Dr Kumar Ghorpadé**, 1861 Bethel Street, Kalyana Nagar, Bangalore 560 043 & e-mail: varanus.kg@mailcity.com

BIRDING NOTES Compiled by Aasheesh Pittie

This column publishes birding notes in brief telegraphic form, from **Andhra Pradesh, Goa, Haryana, Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra, Punjab, Rajasthan & Tamil Nadu** on interesting and significant sightings and behaviour like breeding, feeding, migration, nesting, etc. Notes on flowering and fruiting trees and their relationship with birds are also welcome. English names and classification follow, S.D. Ripley's *A Synopsis of the Birds of India and Pakistan* (1982, 2nd ed.) and scientific nomenclature, T. Inskipp, N. Lindsey & W. Duckworth's *An Annotated Checklist of the Birds of the Oriental Region* (1996). Unless specified, all observations are for 1999. Abbreviations, Contributors, Notes, Regional Referees, *etc.*, are at the end. For selection of breeding criteria 'Probable, Possible, Confirmed', see *Pitta* # 82, February 1998, p. 4.

ANDHRA PRADESH

CHITTOOR DISTRICT

Baiji Cheruvu (VS)

PURPLE HERON 24.11.98: 1; PINTAIL 24.11.98: 100; MARSH HARRIER 24.11.98: 1; COOT 24.11: CB, 6 yng with ad.; GREEN SANDPIPER 24.11.98: 5; SPOTTED SANDPIPER 24.11.98: 10+; BLUETAILED BEE-EATER 18.1: 4; ROLLER 18.1: PRB, 2 pairs disp.; SYKES'S CRESTED LARK 18.1: PRB, 2 disp.

Ghattu Village (near Rishi Valley along Kadiri Road) 18.1 (VS)

GREY HERON CB, 6 N on Banyan tree *Ficus bengalensis*. Const., & incubation in progress; PARIAH KITE PRB, 1 N under const on Banyan tree.

Ghumma Samudram (near Rishi Valley along Kadiri Road) 18.1 (VS)

WHITENECKED STORK 3.

Pedda Cheruvu (near Rishi Valley along Kadiri Road) 18.1 (VS)

SHOVELLER 80.

PTM Tank 18.1 (VS)

LARGE CORMORANT 24.11.98; DARTER 3; LARGE EGRET 1; WHITE IBIS 1; BLACK IBIS 1; COMMON POCHARD; TUFTED POCHARD; MONTAGU'S HARRIER 1 F; KESTREL 2; ROSY PASTOR 100+.

Rishi Valley (VS)

DABCHICK 9.1: CB, ad., with 2 yng; 27.3: CB, 8-10 yng; LITTLE GREEN BITTERN 23-25.11.98: 1; CATTLE EGRET 3.4: POB, in br., plm; NIGHT HERON 20.2: CB, 1 juv; 20.3: CB, 1 juv; CHESTNUT BITTERN 28.12.98: 1; CRESTED HONEY BUZZARD 24.2: 1; PARIAH KITE 27.3: CB, 1 N on Rain tree; SHIKRA 15.3: PRB, N under const; 28.3: CB, copulating; BESRA SPARROW-HAWK 23-25.11.98: 1 M; 9.1: 1; CRESTED HAWK-EAGLE 9.1: 1; BOOTED HAWK-EAGLE 21.2: 1 dark phase; PALE HARRIER 23-25.11.98: 1M; SHORT-TOED EAGLE 20.11.98: 1; 13.2: 1; CRESTED SERPENT EAGLE 29.11.98: 1; 13.1: hrd; SHAHEEN FALCON 13.2: 1; KESTREL 12.12.98: 1; 13.2: 2; WHITEBREASTED WATERHEN 28.11.98: CB, 2 yng, ¾ size of ad.; INDIAN MOORHEN 1.4: 1; REDWATTLED LAPWING 20.3: CB, pair with 1 month-old chick; RUFOUS TURTLE-DOVE 30.1: 2 in paddyfield; LITTLE BROWN DOVE 30.11.98: POB, courtship; BLOSSOMHEADED PARAKEET 3.4: 1 hrd; PIED CRESTED CUCKOO 31.1: 1; COMMON HAWK-CUCKOO 15.2: hrd; KOEL 1.4: PRB, singing; GREAT HORNED OWL 23-25.11.98: 1 hrd. 2.1: hrd; 14.2: hrd; BROWN FISH OWL 23-25.11.98: 1 chased by crows; ROLLER 20.3: PRB, pair copulating; HOOPOE 23.3: CB, carrying food in bill; GREY HORNBILL 9.3: 1; 5.4: 4 on fruiting Pipal Tree *Ficus religiosa*; COPPERSMITH 30.11.98: 15+ sunning atop Casuarina tree; 25.2: CB, 1N in dead branch of tree; BLACKBACKED WOODPECKER 20.2: 1M, 1F; INDIAN PITTA 20.11.98: hrd; DUSKY CRAG MARTIN 31.1: 5; BROWN SHRIKE 28.11.98: 1; HAIRCRESTED DRONGO 20.11.98: 2. 29.11.98: 3. 30.11.98: feeding on Eucalyptus flower nectar; 9.1: 2. 30.1: 1; 20.2: 3 on flowering Coral tree; 28.3: 1; WHITEBROWED BULBUL 3.1.: with a dragonfly in bill; BLUETHROATED FLYCATCHER 20.11.98: hrd several; VERDITER FLYCATCHER 5.12.98: 1; 10.1: 1; 25.2: 1; BLACKNAPED MONARCH FLYCATCHER 23-25.11.98: 2 hrd; 3.1: 3; PLAIN PRINIA 23-25.11.98: cb, pair with 3 fledgelings in paddies; INDIAN GREAT REED WARBLER 13.12.98: 3 hrd. 20.2: 2 hrd; BLYTH'S REED WARBLER 20.11.98: hrd several; LESSER WHITETHROAT 23-25.11.98: 4; BLUE ROCK THRUSH 31.1: 1M, 1F; 14.2: 1M; LARGE PIED WAGTAIL 20.2: CB, 1 juv.; PURPLERUMPED SUNBIRD 28.11.98: PRB, N under const.; 28.3: PRB, N under const.; LOTEN'S SUNBIRD 30.11.98: POB, carrying N-matl; PURPLE SUNBIRD 28.11.98: M in eclipse plm; WHITEBACKED MUNIA 3.1: PRB, 2 carrying N-matl; ROSEFINCH 10.1: 3; 16.1: 2; 22.1: 1.

MEDAK DISTRICT

ICRISAT Campus 23.5 (CTH)

LITTLE EGRET POB, feet greenish-blue *contra* yellow; MEDIAN EGRET PRB numerous, many courting birds with bright orange-red eyes, blue lores, black bill; BLACK IBIS; WHITE IBIS; BRAHMINY DUCK 1 (injured); COMB DUCK many; SPOTBILL DUCK very many; SHORT-TOED EAGLE; PHEASANT-TAILED JACANA PRB, br plm; REDWATTLED LAPWING CB, 2 fuzzy chicks; GREY HORNBILL 1; BLACK DRONGO recently moulted birds with brownish secondaries and short tails; BAYA PRB, N under const; BLACKTHROATED WEAVER M with prominent white cheeks and throat.

RANGAREDDI DISTRICT

Anantagiri 26.4 (HJ)

CRESTED SERPENT EAGLE 2; SMALL GREENBILLED MALKOHA; WHITEBELLIED DRONGO; WHITETHROATED GROUND THRUSH.

KARNATAKA

BANGALORE DISTRICT

Bangalore City

ALEXANDRINE PARAKEET 6.5: 2 M, 1 F regularly on *Spathodea campanulata*.[1] (KG, SR); HOUSE CROW 30.4: Feeding on a white caterpillar (or pupa) of Giant Red-eye Butterfly *Gangara thyris*, Hesperidae family (JNP); ASHY WREN WARBLER 19.4: CB, sitting in nest on a Caster plant but no eggs (DA).

Harohalli (Bangalore City) 2.5 (AM)

MAGPIE ROBIN CB, a pair N 8' up in vertical hollow pipe. Both M & F feeding yng.

MYSORE DISTRICT

Bandipur Tiger Reserve 26.4: (AM)

REDWATTLED LAPWING CB, 2 chicks running & squatting when approached.

SHIMOGA DISTRICT

Shettihalli Wildlife Sanctuary 24.4(DA, GBK, PSJ)

CRESTED HONEY BUZZARD carrying off an un-id snake; GREAT BLACK WOODPECKER 2 pairs drumming; INDIAN MYNA PRB frequenting a tree-crevice; HILL MYNA PRB 1 carrying N-matl to tree hole while other looks out from the it.

MAHARASHTRA

RAIGAD DISTRICT

Alibag (Akshi Beach) 1.5 (NJ)

WHITEBELLLIED SEA EAGLE 1; LARGE SAND PLOVER 15 some in complete br. plm; LESSER SAND PLOVER 55; CURLEW 3; BARTAILED GODWIT 1; TEREK SANDPIPER 5; TURNSTONE 35 many in br. plm; LITTLE STINT 5; WHISKERED TERN 1 in br. plm; GULLBILLED TERN 15; LITTLE TERN 25.

PONDICHERRY

Pondicherry University Campus 27-30.4 (VS)
GREY PARTRIDGE several; COMMON HAWK-CUCKOO hrd; GREAT HORNED OWL 1; BLACK DRONGO CB, 1 N; ASHY SWALLOW-SHRIKE 4 chasing crows, N?; INDIAN MYNA CB, 2 N; MAGPIE-ROBIN singing; FOREST WAGTAIL 27,28.4: 4 heading north; PURPLE SUNBIRD singing.

PUNJAB

GURDASPUR DISTRICT (HS)
Harike
DARTER 30.1-2.2: 70; NIGHT HERON 30.1-2.2: 50+; GREYLAG GOOSE 31.1: 100+; PINTAIL 30.1-2.2: 650; WIGEON 30.1-2.2: 600+; REDCRESTED POCHARD 30.1-2.2: 800+; WHITE-EYED POCHARD 30.1-2.2: 8; HEN HARRIER 1.2: 1; GREAT BLACKHEADED GULL[2] 1.2: 1; EASTERN STOCK DOVE 1.2-2.2: 2,500; RUFOUS TURTLE DOVE 1.2: 2; EAGLE-OWL 2.2: 2; LONGEARED OWL 2.2: 6; LONGTAILED GRASS WARBLER 31.1-2.2: 2-3; STRIATED MARSH WARBLER 31.1-2.2: 2-3; PADDYFIELD WARBLER 31.1-2.2: 2-3; BROOKS'S LEAF WARBLER 2.2: 2; GREY-HEADED FLYCATCHER-WARBLER 1.2: 3; WHITE-TAILED STONE CHAT 30.1-2.2: 4-5; WHITE-CAPPED REDSTART 1.2: 1; REDTHROATED THRUSH[3] 31.1-2.2: 2; HIMALAYAN TREECREEPER 31.1: 2; YELLOW WAGTAIL 1.2: 200+; YELLOW-HEADED WAGTAIL 1.2: 50+; SIND SPARROW 31.1-1.2: 15.
Rababsar 1.2
GREYLAG GOOSE 2,000; BARTAILED GODWIT 1,200.

RAJASTHAN

AJMER DISTRICT (HS)
Anasagar 5.2
WHITE PELICAN 10; DALMATIAN PELICAN 10; WHITETAILED LAPWING 15.
Sonkhalia 7.2
KING VULTURE 1; HIMALAYAN GRIFFON 1; WHITEBACKED VULTURE 12; SPARROWHAWK 1; REDHEADED MERLIN 1; SARUS CRANE 2; YELLOW-WATTLED LAPWING 11; INDIAN COURSER 7; INDIAN SANDGROUSE 20+; GREAT HORNED OWL 2; WRYNECK 3; INDIAN BUSH LARK 11; SHORT-TOED LARK 1,200+; GREY SHRIKE 10+; RUFOUSBACKED SHRIKE 4; WHITEBELLIED MINIVET 2; RUFOUSFRONTED PRINIA 25; ORPHEAN WARBLER 5; STOLICZKA'S BUSHCHAT 4; STONECHAT 15; PIED BUSHCHAT 7; ISABELLINE WHEATEAR 3; DESERT WHEATEAR 10; PIED CHAT 12; TAWNY PIPIT 70+; SPANISH SPARROW 4.

SAWAI MADHOPUR DISTRICT (HS)
Ranthambhor 25.1
ORANGEHEADED GROUND THRUSH 1; FIRECAPPED TIT 1; SPOTTED GREY CREEPER 1.
Sambhar Lake 5.2
FLAMINGO 100; LESSER FLAMINGO 200; COMMON SHELDUCK 3; KENTISH PLOVER 200+; CURLEW-SANDPIPER 3; REDNECKED PHALAROPE 15[4].
Soorwal 26.1
INDIAN SKIMMER 8.

TAMIL NADU

NILGIRIS DISTRICT
Masinagudi 22.4 (AM)
INDIAN ROBIN CB, 1 N 2' up in bamboo hollow with 3 eggs; MAGPIE ROBIN PRB, N const., in a crevice of *Anogeissus* sp. tree, 8' up; REDVENTED BULBUL 25.4: PRB, carrying N-matl;
Chammanatham 22.4
COUCAL PRB, carrying N-matl in Sigur Plateau.
Bokkapuram (Masinagudi) 24.4
WHITEBREASTED KINGFISHER POB, entering N-hole (?) in mud embankment.

VELLORE DISTRICT
Javadi Hills 7-10.2 (VS)
GREY JUNGLEFOWL hrd; GREEN SANDPIPER 2; COMMON HAWK-CUCKOO hrd; BROWN FISH OWL 1; BARRED JUNGLE OWLET 4 hrd; ROLLER PRB, competing for tree hole with Roseringed Parakeets and Indian Mynas; BLACKBACKED WOODPECKER hrd; LITTLE SCALYBELLIED GREEN WOODPECKER 1[@]; RACKET-TAILED DRONGO 3[@]; BRONZED DRONGO 2; ORANGE MINIVET 4; SPOTTED BABBLER hrd; SLATYHEADED SCIMITAR BABBLER hrd freq.; SHAMA hrd freq.; FOREST WAGTAIL 3; WHITE-EYE C.

ABBREVIATIONS: Ab-abundant; ad-adult/s; br-breeding; C-common/ly; CB-confirmed breeding; const-construction/ing; *c.*-approximately; disp-display/ing; F-female; flt-flight; fly-family; freq-frequent/ly; hrd-heard; id-identify/ied; imm-immature; inc-include/ing; Is-Island; juv-juvenile; LM-local migrant; M-male; mat-material; N-nest/ing/s; POB-possible breeding; PRB-probable breeding; plm-plumage; RF-Reserve Forest; Resp-respectively; Tlk-Taluk; vil-village; WL-wildlife; yng-young.

CONTRIBUTORS: A Madhusudan (AM); CT Hash (CTH); D Ajit (DA); GB Kiran (GBK); H Jaffer (HJ); H Sangha (HS); JN Prasad (JNP); K Ghorpadé (KG); N Jamdar (NJ); PS Javagal (PSJ); S Riyazuddin (SR); V Santharam (VS).

NOTES: "98" refers to 1998.

[1] Authors feel these could be escapees but observe that the birds' plumage was in very good condition.

[2] *Larus ichthyaetus*.

[3] *Turdus ruficollis atrogularis*.

[4] First inland record for Rajasthan (HS).

[@] on flowering Silk Cotton *Bombax ceiba*.

ERRATA: *Pitta* # 96: 6. Under Karnataka, Bangalore, dates were not printed for the following species: Blackcapped Kingfisher 8.3; Small Green Barbet 21.3 and, Coppersmith 21.3.

REGIONAL REFEREES: Andhra Pradesh: A Pittie; Goa: H Lainer; Haryana: H Sangha; Karnataka: JN Prasad; Kerala: PO Nameer; Maharashtra: N Jamdar; Punjab: H Sangha; Rajasthan: H Sangha; Tamil Nadu: V Santharam.

For Private Circulation Only

For more information, write to: Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh, PO Box 45, Banjara Hills PO, Hyderabad 500034, India.
Editors: Aasheesh Pittie (3350683) & Siraj A Taher (3352607) **E-mail**: AASHEESH@HD1.VSNL.NET.IN
Membership (Rs): Admission=20; Ordinary=100, Student=25 per annum; Life=1,000. *Outstation cheques not accepted.*
Illustration: page 2 by Dr S Subramanya.

IPTTA

Bulletin of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh No. 99 : July 1999

1/VII/1999

PROGRAMME Undelivered 14.2.2001

FIELD OUTING: 11-7-1999: Kasu Brahmanand Reddy National Park (Chiran Palace), Hyderabad: Members are requested to assemble near main gate, by 7.30am. This will be a half-day trip. Bring rainwear if necessary.

INDOOR MEETING: 19-7-1999, 6 p.m.: Talk on Gundla Brahmeshwaram by Rajeev Mathew. Vidyaranya High School, Opp., Secretariat, Saifabad, Hyderabad 500004.

NOTES & NEWS

Launch of the Indian Bird Conservation Network (IBCN)

A network has been established to promote the conservation of birds in India and, through them, all biodiversity. It comes out of a workshop in late 1998 convened by Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS) and attended by 35 members of India's conservation and ornithological community, including Sálim Ali Centre for Ornithology and Natural History (SACON), Wildlife Institute of India (WII), Indian Institute of Public Administration (IIPA), WWF, and individuals and NGOs. The initiative was taken by BNHS, BirdLife International (BLI) and Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) of UK as they realized that there are many people and institutions interested in bird conservation issues in India and their efforts could be made much more effective by sharing information and ideas, and collaborating on state- or nation-wide projects.

IBCN will promote conservation action based on sound research. It will be open to all those who share the view that the conservation of birds can contribute to the conservation of all biodiversity, and that this is vital for the spiritual and material well being of human life. The network will be non-political and transparent in all its workings. It will work through consensus building, and use its strength in members and a coordinated approach to problems to achieve maximum effectiveness. It is planned that there will be state co-ordinators to help the flow of information and to bring local issues to the attention of the whole network. To start with, the network will be promoted more through those with experience and professional interest in birds. This will allow the network to get established properly before being opened to a general membership. In time, however, the network will be open to all those who are interested, and should become a vehicle for educating and enthusing students and interested members of the public about birds and through them, conservation.

BNHS has recently become the Indian partner of the global NGO family of BLI. Through the BLI network, BNHS has secured some support for the operation of the IBCN from the RSPB, the UK BLI Partner, for the next five years. This will allow BNHS to produce a newsletter, facilitate the exchange of information, and link members who can offer advice with those who need it. It will cover the costs of employing a network coordinator to ensure that all of this happens. Dissemination of results to decision-makers, conservationists, media and back to the network members themselves will be an important part of the coordinator's role.

It is intended that as well as encouraging local projects, BNHS will run nation-wide data gathering projects which all members of the network can participate in. The first of these will be the Indian Important Bird Areas project. This project, part of a global initiative by BLI, uses the presence of threatened or habitat-specific birds to identify a minimum set of sites for conservation. The project will have major advocacy, education and scientific components, and discussions have begun about how it can complement and support the existing conservation initiatives such as the Biodiversity Conservation Prioritization Project and the IIPA Review of Protected Areas.

Members will be kept informed about important developments with the IBCN, but if you would like to receive information personally, please contact BNHS at the following address: Network Manager, Indian Bird Conservation Network, Bombay Natural History Society, Hornbill House, Shaheed Bhagat Singh Road, Mumbai 400 023, India. Telephone: 091 022 2821811 Fax: 091 022 2837615 E-mail: bnhs@bom3.vsnl.net.in.

Sarus Crane (*Grus antigone*)

"The Sarus has declined in numbers in India. Experts in the field like Mr. Prakash Gole of Pune, Dr. Archibald of the International Crane Foundation and the like are of the opinion that loss of habitat is the main culprit. A project was initiated by the name of "Impact of Changes in Land Use Patterns on the Habitat and Ecology of the Indian Sarus Crane (*Grus antigone*) in India", by the Wildlife Institute of India at Dehradun under the direction of Mr. B.C. Choudhury.

"The project has now completed one year of its life. This year was dedicated to finding out the distribution, status and demography of the Sarus in India. Under the project, the states of Jammu & Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Haryana, Punjab, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, West Bengal and Maharashtra were surveyed. The results are somewhat unexpected in that while an increase in the distribution range was recorded (in Jammu & Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Bihar and West Bengal), the abundances recorded in different areas are lower than those recorded by a similar survey conducted by Mr. Prakash Gole in 1989. As has been recorded earlier by several naturalists at the local scale, such as Mr. Rakesh Vyas and Dr. Parasharya in Rajasthan and Gujarat respectively, the recruitment* rate in Sarus Crane populations is very low—varying from 3% to 14% in different states.

"Mr. Gole estimated a total population of 12,000 to 15,000 Sarus in India and this study has arrived at an estimate of 8,000 to 10,000. That is a decline of 15 to 30 percent in the population in a span of ten years! The principal threats seem to be the changes in land-use patterns—conversion of natural wetlands to agricultural fields and change in cropping patterns to crops such as sugarcane and Soya bean which are not Sarus-friendly—all over the distribution range. Stealing of eggs, capture of adult birds for, presumably, the pet trade, hunting, collision with high tension power lines and, to a less obvious and less understood degree, pesticide / insecticide use in agriculture fields.

"The next few years of the project are going to be dedicated to study of the ecology of the Sarus in two or three select areas to try and decipher the exact reasons and extent of their decline.

"Given the fact that a quick and effective way has to be devised to spread the news of the decline and that data from a larger area would be invaluable to develop a conservation plan, the Project has organized a Collaborative Sarus Count. This count aims to spread the news of the status of the Sarus, get people involved in its conservation, and set up grounds for a voluntary long-term monitoring programme. Presently, we have liasoned with the WWF-India network, members of the BNHS, the Protected Area Network of the country involving the state wildlife wings and, recently, the Nehru Yuva Kendra Sangathan. In addition we have written to several individuals who may provide necessary data from the field. The count is planned for June 21 1999, the longest day in the year for India. The objective is to do a count in a wetland where one is aware of a Sarus population. It is probably best to do the count in the early hours of the day or in late evenings. This is simply because the Sarus congregate most at these times and a total count can be made then. I request the readers of *Pitta* to participate in the Count. You may send the count results by e-mail by filling up the interactive questionnaire at the site www.geocities.com/RainForest/Jungle/3966/survey.html, or write to the Honorary Secretary, BSAP for forms.

"We hope to make this count an annual event and obtain long-term data on the abundance and status of Sarus Cranes.

Please feel free to contact me if you require any further information regarding either the Sarus Crane or the Crane Count."

[*The annual rate at which the number of chicks/ juveniles/ sub-adults are assumed added to the entire population.

K.S. Gopi Sundar, Research Fellow, Wildlife Institute of India, P.B.18, Chandrabani, Dehradun 248001. (0135)-640112 to 115.]

Magnets Ease Cleanup of Oil-Soaked Birds

LONDON (Reuters) The tortuous and distressing process of cleaning birds caught in oil spills may soon become much easier thanks to magnets, Australian researchers say.

Instead of scrubbing oily feathers with detergents that can destroy their waterproof properties, scientists at Victoria University of Technology in Melbourne say the feathers can be dusted with fine iron powder. Combing them with a magnet will then remove both the oil and the iron.

"We were quite amazed by the efficiency of the cleansing process," John Orbell told New Scientist magazine. "Iron powder is cheap and plentiful and both nontoxic and a nonirritant."

Orbell and his colleagues devised the new dry cleaning method after discovering that oil sticks to iron powder more readily than to feathers.

The new cleaning process is both quicker and less stressful for the birds, taking only a matter of minutes.

In laboratory tests on duck feathers, one combing with a magnet removed 88% of light crude oil and 60%of other types. After 10 combings, 97% of all types of oil were removed.

Orbell and his colleagues are working on a portable field unit so that birds can be treated immediately at the site of an oil spill. [Richard A. Danca rdanca@ix.netcom.com on BIRDCHAT@LISTSERV.ARIZONA.EDU]

Darwin's Finches

"There exists a popular misapprehension that the Galápagos finches—famed now as 'Darwin's Finches,' thirteen species of drab little birds with differently shaped beaks and correspondingly distinct ecological niches—inspired Darwin's great insight into evolution. But here's a bit of spoilsport historical reality: It wasn't the finches that inspired Darwin, it was the mockingbirds.

"He called them 'mocking-thrushes,' and in the *Journal** he acknowledged their role: 'My attention was first thoroughly aroused, by comparing together the numerous specimens, shot by myself and several other parties on board, of the mocking-thrushes, when, to my astonishment, I discovered that all those from Charles Island belonged to one species (Mimus trifasciatus); all from Albemarle Island to M. parvulus; and all from James and Chatham Islands (between which two other islands are situated, as connecting links) belonged to M. melanotis.' The scientific names are different today (*Mimus* has become *Nesomimus*), as are the names of the islands themselves (James, for instance, has become Santiago), but the meaning remains constant. Four species of Galápagos mockingbird have diverged from a common ancestor. Within one of those species, seven subspecies are now native to seven separate islands. It's archipelago speciation in fact and in progress. Darwin saw the pattern and knew that something was up.

"The pattern is relatively simple. No two mockingbird species inhabit any one island. This contrasts notably with the distributional pattern of the finches, which is a tangled skein. Among the finches there have been multiple colonizations this way and that, with as many as ten finch species now coexisting on some of the islands. Why is the mockingbird pattern simple? Possibly the mockingbirds are less adventurous than the finches, less inclined to travel between islands. Possibly they arrived in the archipelago more recently and they just haven't had time. Whatever the reason, the divergence of the mockingbirds hasn't progressed past an elementary stage. The different species and subspecies remain isolated on separate islands, and they haven't forced one another into strange new roles by the pressure of competition."

[David Quammen *in* The Song of the Dodo: Island Biogeography in an Age of Extinctions. *Darwin, Charles (1839): *Journal of Researches into the Geology and Natural History of the Various Countries Visited by H.M.S. Beagle, Under the Command of Captain Fitzroy, R.N. from 1832 to 1836.* London: Henry Colburn.]

Calendar of Events

July-December 1999: 1st Sunday of every month: BSAP's Gardens & Semi-wilderness Area Surveys. The project continues for another 6 months. Fortnightly surveys reduced to monthly. Further details from 'KC' (3751652) / H Taher (3352607).

BNHS Programmes (Complete details from BNHS 022-2821811. Camps for members of BNHS, nature-walks & talks open to all):

11.7: Borivli National Park (main gate) 7.00am—nature walk.

29.7: BNHS 6.30pm: AVP on Corbett National Park.

19.8: BNHS 6.30pm: AVP on Living Forests.

26.8: BNHS 6.30pm: AVP on Monsoon in Melghat.

2-3 October 1999: World Birdwatch'99.

1st week October 1999: Wildlife week.

12th November 1999: Sálim Ali Bird Count—organized by BNHS.

LETTER FROM AN INSECT-HUNTING ORNITHOLOGIST—27

"In the birds of the kingfisher—roller assemblage, except for the cuckoo rollers, the front toes are more or less united at the base. This group is a large one, including ten families. Among them are the widespread kingfishers . . . . . All of these have rather large bills, and usually sit up straight and dart down to earth after their animal prey. A few of the kingfishers catch fish rather than insects. Also included are the bee eaters of the Old World, partly aerial feeders that often sit up watching for passing insects which they dart out to seize in flight. The rollers of the Old World are somewhat like the bee eaters in habits, but have a short, stout bill and a broad gape instead of a long, slender bill . . . . . The hoopoes of the Old World have a long slightly curved bill and a strange flattened crest. They often feed by walking on the ground . . . . . Hornbills, of the Old World tropics, are large birds with big bills, sometimes with an elaborate casque on the bill; they have small feet and broad wings, they feed on fruit or insects on trees, and some species of hornbills catch insects on the ground.

"The woodpeckers and their relatives are tree birds, ranging in size from very small to medium, and normally having two toes in front and two toes behind, like the cuckoos. They are structurally so similar to the perching birds . . . . . that they have been united with them in one order. This order includes a diversity of birds, among them the toucans, honey guides, barbets and jacamars.

"Finally we come to the great assemblage of perching, or passerine, birds, an order which contains more species than all the rest put together. They range in size from a honey eater three inches long to the raven more than two feet long, and the lyrebird which with its magnificent tail reaches over three feet in length. Most of the species in this order are rather generalized in bill, wings, tail, and feet. The feet are designed for perching, with three toes in front and one, well developed, behind. However the various birds are very diversified in behaviour.

"The songbirds, called Oscines by some authors, comprise the greater part of this order; their syrinx is more complete than that of other birds. The common garden birds, such as thrushes, sparrows, warblers, and swallows, are song birds."

[Austin L. Rand, 1967, *Ornithology : An Introduction*, pp. 281-282]

Kingfishers, Bee-eaters, Rollers, Hoopoe, and Hornbills form the Coraciiformes, some 201 species known (in 45 genera) from all over the world, except in the north temperate, arctic, and antarctic areas, and most parts of the Sahara Desert. Half of the ten families of this Order occur in our region, as residents. Sibley & Monroe treat Hornbills (Bucerotidae) as a separate Order, the Bucerotiformes, and they also recognize another Order, Upupiformes, for the single Hoopoe! From our region are recorded 13 Kingfishers (*Megaceryle* Kaup, *Ceryle* Boie, *Alcedo* Linnaeus, *Ceyx* Lacépède, *Halcyon* Swainson, *Todiramphus* Lesson), 6 Bee-eaters (*Merops* Linnaeus, *Nyctyornis* Jardine & Selby), 3 Rollers (*Coracias* Linnaeus, *Eurystomus* Vieillot), a Hoopoe (*Upupa* Linnaeus), and 10 Hornbills (*Ocyceros* Hume, *Anorrhinus* Bonaparte, *Aceros* Hodgson, *Anthracoceros* Reichenbach, *Buceros* Linnaeus). Our endemic species are five—the Indian Grey, Malabar Grey and Ceylon Grey Hornbills (*Ocyceros birostris*, *O. griseus*, *O. gingalensis*—this genus is also autochthonous here), the Narcondam Hornbill (*Aceros narcondami*), and the Coronetted Pied Hornbill (*Anthracoceros coronatus*). It is noticeable that no Kingfishers are our endemics, though *Ceyx rufidorsus* (Rufous-backed Three-toed Kingfisher) from Sikkim, which I prefer to recognize as valid until proven otherwise, could be one such?

Woodpeckers and their allies (Piciformes) are transitory between the non-Passeriformes and the Passeriformes Orders, and evidently are a post—Gondwanaland offshoot. Three of the six recognized families occur in our area. Sibley & Monroe treat Old World Barbets as an additional, distinct, family, the Megalaimidae, but these are here retained by me in the Capitonidae. There are 381 species (in 66 genera) known from most parts of the earth, except from the arctic and the antarctic, from all of Australia, New Zealand, all of the Pacific Ocean islands east of Celebes and Flores, from the Sahara—Arabian deserts and, curiously, also from Madagascar! In our region, there are (all resident) some 11 Barbets (*Megalaima* G.R. Gray), 1 Honeyguide (*Indicator* Stephens), 1 wintering Wryneck (*Jynx* Linnaeus), 2 Piculets (*Picumnus* Temminck, *Sasia* Hodgson), and an abundance of 35 Woodpeckers (*Celeus* Boie, *Picus* Linnaeus, *Dinopium* Rafinesque, *Gecinulus* Blyth, *Mulleripicus* Bonaparte, *Dryocopus* Boie, *Dendrocopos* Koch, *Picoides* Lacépède, *Hemicircus* Swainson, *Blythipicus* Bonaparte, *Chrysocolaptes* Blyth). Eighteen species are endemic here, occurring only in our sub-continent and nowhere else in the world—the Large Green, Small Green, Yellow-fronted, Crimson-throated, and Yellow-throated Barbets (*Megalaima zeylanica*, *M. viridis*, *M. flavifrons*, *M. malabarica*, *M. rubricapilla*), the Himalayan Honeyguide (*Indicator xanthonotus*), Jerdon's Woodpecker (*Picus chlorigaster*), the Lesser Golden-backed, Ceylon Red-backed, Himalayan Three-toed, and Whistler's Three-toed Woodpeckers (*Dinopium benghalense*, *D. psarodes*, *D. shorii*, *D. malabaricum*), Andamans Black Woodpecker (*Dryocopus hodgei*), the Sindh Pied, Himalayan Pied, Brown-fronted Pied, and Yellow-fronted Pied Woodpeckers (*Dendrocopos assimilis*, *D. himalayensis*, *D. auriceps*, *D. mahrattensis*), and the Black-backed and Layard's Woodpeckers (*Chrysocolaptes festivus*, *C. stricklandi*).

Eventually we come to the Order Passeriformes, the most numerous and recent group of living birds, which has evolved and colonised every corner of our earth except Antarctica, interior Greenland and some extreme arctic islands near this world's largest island which is mainly ice-bound and polar. Various authorities divide the Order into some 60-70 families, of which 28 are found in the Indian region (see Table on p. 4). Six of these families are further broken down into 20 subfamilies here. Some 5,400 species (in *ca* 1,120 genera) are known from the world, which outnumber the 3,600 or so species (in 909 genera) of all of the 25-30 Orders of the non-Passeriformes. Our non-Passeriformes belong to 19 Orders (+ 1 fossil), 52 families (+ 1 fossil), and 5 subfamilies (in 2 families) in which 634 species (112 endemic) are classified in 247 genera (8 endemic). In the Table below I have given a break-up of the 28 family (and 20 subfamily, in 6 families) affiliations of our 778 Passeriformes species (183 endemic) belonging to 190 genera (8 endemic). Hence, the Indian region has a total of 20 Orders, 80 Families, 437 Genera (16 endemic), and 1,412 Species (295 endemic), as recognized in my UPDATED CHECKLIST. The classification adopted by Inskipp *et al.* (1996), in their ANNOTATED CHECKLIST, will be listed in my next Letter. They recognize, for these very Indian species, 25 families and 25 subfamilies, besides also 16 "tribes" in 7 of their subfamilies. This taxonomic category of Tribe is employed, mainly for the Class Insecta (insects), for intermediate groups between the genus and subfamily. It is interesting to read what Alexander Wetmore [1960, *Smithsonian Miscellaneous Publications* 139(11), ii+37 pp.] felt about bird "tribes" ——

"In view of the limited number of species covered in ornithology I see no point in the introduction of tribes as another category between the subfamily and the genus. This may be useful to entomologists with their tens of thousands of species but seems unnecessary and cumbersome with birds. In some of the more comprehensive avian genera there are groups of species more closely allied to one another than to their fellows, but the taxonomist may discuss these as need [*sic*! -- KG] as groups without imposing another burden on a classification that now is highly divided." (*loc. cit.*, pp. 22-23).

Four Suborders of the Passeriformes are generally accepted but are not mentioned by Inskipp *et al.* (1996). The Menurae include the strictly Australian Lyrebirds and Scrub-birds. The Suborder Tyranni, with 12-14 families, are doubtless of Gondwanaland ancestry, mainly Neotropical (the Americas south of the United States) but also some Old World families found in Madagascar (Asities), Africa, the Oriental Region & northern Australia (Pittas) and New Zealand (New Zealand Wrens). The vast bulk of the Passeriformes are grouped in the Suborder Passeres (or Oscines) and include all of the "singing" birds, placed in 50-60 families, around half of these having been recorded from our sub-continent.

The Broadbills, Eurylaimidae, are the sole representatives of the other Suborder, the Eurylaimi, including 14 species (in 8 genera), exhibiting an interesting 'disjunct' distribution, in Africa south of the Sahara and then in the Indo-Chinese peninsula and the Malay Archipelago east to Wallace's Line (including the southern Philippine islands). Our area has two species of Broadbills (*Serilophus* Swainson, *Psarisomus* Swainson), that extend west only along the Himalayas to Nepal or even to Garhwal.

The Pittas belong to the Tyranni and the 26 species of the single genus (*Pitta* Vieillot) are also restricted to Africa (but not Madagascar!) and S., E. & S.E. Asia, extending to northern Australia. Of our 5 species, the Indian Pitta (*Pitta brachyura*) is endemic to the sub-continent.

In forthcoming Letters, I will briefly analyse and document basic information on our 26 families of the Passeres or Oscines, sticking to the "Old Wetmore tapestry" used by Ripley (and Sálim Ali) and most other authorities. It will take a detailed analytical treatment to satisfactorily compare and contrast this sequence with that of Sibley & Monroe 'embraced' by Inskipp and his co-authors, so I will only comment on major changes in phylogenetic relationships made by them and simply direct the reader to the "I—L—D" (Inskipp, Lindsey & Duckworth) sequence, that I will list in my next Letter, for quick comparison.

THE ORDER *PASSERIFORMES* IN THE INDIAN REGION

Eurylaimidae	**2 (0)**	**2 (0)**
Pittidae	**1 (0)**	**5 (1)**
Alaudidae	**9 (0)**	**23 (6)**
Hirundinidae	**3 (0)**	**17 (3)**
Laniidae	**1 (0)**	**14 (1)**
Oriolidae	**1 (0)**	**5 (0)**
Dicruridae	**1 (0)**	**11 (3)**
Artamidae	**1 (0)**	**2 (0)**
Sturnidae	**6 (1)**	**21 (8)**
Corvidae	**10 (0)**	**28 (6)**
Bombycillidae	**2 (0)**	**2 (0)**
Bombycillinae	1 (0)	1 (0)
Hypocolliinae	1 (0)	1 (0)
Campephagidae	**5 (0)**	**17 (3)**
Irenidae	**3 (0)**	**6 (1)**
Pycnonotidae	**7 (0)**	**23 (10)**
Muscicapidae	**90 (6)**	**396 (101)**
Timaliinae	32 (3)	140 (51)
Muscicapinae	8 (0)	36 (8)
Rhipidurinae	1 (0)	4 (2)
Monarchinae	2 (0)	2 (0)
Pachycephalinae	1 (0)	1 (0)
Sylviinae	23 (2)	110 (18)
Turdinae	23 (1)	103 (22)
Troglodytidae	**1 (0)**	**1 (0)**
Cinclidae	**2 (0)**	**2 (0)**
Prunellidae	**1 (0)**	**9 (0)**
Paridae	**6 (0)**	**25 (9)**
Parinae	3 (0)	17 (5)
Remizinae	2 (0)	3 (0)
Aegithalinae	1 (0)	5 (4)
Sittidae	**3 (0)**	**11 (3)**
Sittinae	1 (0)	9 (2)
Tichodrominae	1 (0)	1 (0)
Salpornithinae	1 (0)	1 (1)
Certhiidae	**1 (0)**	**4 (1)**
Motacillidae	**3 (0)**	**31 (3)**
Dicaeidae	**1 (0)**	**11 (4)**
Nectariniidae	**4 (0)**	**17 (5)**
Zosteropidae	**1 (0)**	**2 (1)**
Passeridae	**6 (0)**	**29 (8)**
Passerinae	3 (0)	14 (1)
Ploceinae	1 (0)	4 (2)
Estrildinae	2 (0)	11 (5)
Fringillidae	**16 (1)**	**46 (5)**
Fringillinae	1 (0)	2 (0)
Carduelinae	15 (1)	44 (5)
Emberizidae	**3 (0)**	**18 (1)**

TOTALS = 28 Families, 20 Subfamilies, 190 Genera (8 endemic), 778 Species (183 endemic)

[**Errata: Letter # 25** — Line 3 from bottom of text para 1 on page 3 should read "Davison's Ibis"; line 3 of para 2 on page 3 should read "All 7 Geese" **Letter # 26** — Line 7 from bottom of para 2 on page 3 should read "20 Terns"; in last line on page 2 delete, "the latter genus autochthonous here"]

--- **Dr Kumar Ghorpadé**, 1861 Bethel Street, Bangalore 560 043 & e-mail: varanus.kg@mailcity.com

BIRDING NOTES Compiled by Aasheesh Pittie

This column publishes birding notes in brief telegraphic form, from **Andhra Pradesh, Goa, Haryana, Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra, Punjab, Rajasthan & Tamil Nadu** on interesting and significant sightings and behaviour like breeding, feeding, migration, nesting, etc. Notes on flowering and fruiting trees and their relationship with birds are also welcome. English names and classification follow, S.D. Ripley's *A Synopsis of the Birds of India and Pakistan* (1982, 2nd ed.) and scientific nomenclature, T. Inskipp, N. Lindsey & W. Duckworth's *An Annotated Checklist of the Birds of the Oriental Region* (1996). Unless specified, all observations are for 1999. Abbreviations, Contributors, Notes, Regional Referees, *etc.*, are at the end. For selection of breeding criteria 'Probable, Possible, Confirmed', see *Pitta* # 82, February 1998, p. 4.

ANDHRA PRADESH

KURNOOL DISTRICT

GBM Plateau 2-3.5 (RM)[1]

CRESTED HAWK-EAGLE; CRESTED SERPENT EAGLE; JUNGLE BUSH QUAIL; GREY JUNGLEFOWL; PAINTED SPURFOWL CB, 3 yng; PEAFOWL; GREEN IMPERIAL PIGEON; EMERALD DOVE; ALEXANDRINE PARAKEET; LORIKEET; BROWN WOOD OWL; MOTTLED WOOD OWL; BARRED JUNGLE OWLET; FRANKLIN'S NIGHTJAR; COMMON NIGHTJAR; LONGTAILED NIGHTJAR; JUNGLE NIGHTJAR; GREY HORNBILL; BLACKBACKED WOODPECKER; PITTA; BLACKHEADED ORIOLE; JUNGLE MYNA; SCARLET MINIVET[2]; GOLDFRONTED CHLOROPSIS; GOLDMANTLED CHLOROPSIS; YELLOWBROWED BULBUL[2]; REDWHISKERED BULBUL; VELVETFRONTED NUTHATCH; CHESTNUTBELLIED NUTHATCH.

Velgode (GBM Plateau) 1.5 (RM)[1]

WHITENECKED STORK; TAWNY EAGLE CB, on N; GREY JUNGLEFOWL; PAINTED SPURFOWL; JUNGLE BUSH QUAIL; PEAFOWL; ALEXANDRINE PARAKEET; GREY HORNBILL; PITTA; JUNGLE MYNA; SCARLET MINIVET[2]; REDWHISKERED BULBUL; PARADISE FLYCATCHER; WHITEBROWED FANTAIL FLYCATCHER; YELLOWTHROATED SPARROW; RED MUNIA.

KARNATAKA

BANGALORE DISTRICT (JNP/ Y.R.Siddarth)

Ardeshanahalli Tank 26.1 (JNP, YRS)

COOT CB, 31 ad. 19 yng.

Badamanavarthe State Forest 23.5 (NRS)

Female COMMON IORA CB, F on N in roadside hedge *c.* 4.5' from Ground; PURPLERUMPED SUNBIRD PRB, F with N-mat.

Bangalore City 9.5 (JNP)

HOUSE SPARROW PRB, M carrying a feather into N.

Bannerghatta National Park (SK)

GREY PARTRIDGE 2.5 CB, 3 ad., 5 yng; TICKELL'S BLUE FLYCATCHER 6.6: CB, ad., feeding a fledgling; BAYA PRB, hanging from its nest.

Chikka Hoskote Tank 31.1 (JNP, YRS)

PURPLE MOORHEN CB, 2 juv., & 7 ad.

High Grounds 24.5 (JNP)

INDIAN MYNA PRB A pair exploring a hole 18' up an electric pole.

Indian Institute of Science Campus 8.6 (SH)

SCAVENGER VULTURE CB 1 yng, possibly fallen from rooftop N.

GKVK Campus (SS)

JUNGLE CROW CB, 8.5: N with nestlings. 8.6: feeding fledglings. BLACK DRONGO 11.6: CB, feeding fledglings.

Lalbagh (NRS)

DABCHICK 9.5: CB, ad., with 2 yng (PAU); WHITEBREASTED WATERHEN 9.5: 11; PURPLE MOORHEN 12.5: CB, 2 yng with ads; COOT 27.4: CB, 1 ad., 2 yng; PHEASANT-TAILED JACANA 27.4: 1. Rare these days; ROSERINGED PARAKEET 27.4: POB entering hole in coconut tree. INDIAN MYNA 27.4: POB entering hole in same tree as Roseringed Parakeet; SMALL GREEN BARBET 27.4: CB, carrying food to vocal yng in a hole in Pandanus tree. 9.5: CB, carrying food to hole in coconut palm; COPPERSMITH 27.4: CB, ad., carrying food to vocal yng in a Pandanus tree; BLUE HEADED ROCK THRUSH 1.5: 1 F.

Ring Road 9.5 (SB, PAU)

LARGE CORMORANT 3 overhead.

Vidhana Soudha 21.5 (JNP)

INDIAN MYNA CB, carrying food to N-hole 15' up a Tulip Tree *Spathodea campanulata*.

Yelahanka Tank 26.1 (JNP, YRS)

DABCHICK CB ad., with 1 yng; COOT CB, 2 pairs with 1 & 2 yng resp.

BIJAPUR DISTRICT

Mudhol Town 4.5 (RBN)

PURPLERUMPED SUNBIRD CB, N with 2 eggs.

MYSORE DISTRICT

Nagarahole National Park 1-11.5 (SP)

DARTER; PAINTED BUSH QUAIL; RED SPURFOWL CB, seen twice with yng; PEACOCK PRB, M disp., freq., & with their harems; IMPERIAL GREEN PIGEON; RED TURTLE DOVE; LESSER GOLDEN BACKED WOODPECKER; GREAT BLACK WOODPECKER drumming; PYGMY WOODPECKER; YELLOW CHEEKED TIT.

Kabini (Nagarhole National Park) 26.5 (EHR)

KING VULTURE 2; WHITEBACKED VULTURE 6 at a kill on bed of reservoir.

Ranganathittoo Bird Sanctuary 25.5 (EHR)

CATTLE EGRET PRB, N-building.

KERALA

WYNAAD DISTRICT

Wynaad Wildlife Sanctuary 29.5 (AM)

INDIAN MYNA PRB, defending N-hole *c.* 20m up *Syzigium* sp., tree, from Jungle Crows.

MAHARASHTRA

SATARA DISTRICT

Mahabaleshwar 25-29.3 (NJ)#

HONEY BUZZARD; CRESTED HAWK-EAGLE; BLACK EAGLE; CRESTED SERPENT EAGLE; GREY JUNGLEFOWL; RUFOUS TURTLE DOVE; JUNGLE NIGHTJAR; ALPINE SWIFT; WHITE RUMPED SPINETAILED SWIFT; SMALL GREEN BARBET; SMALL YELLOWNAPED WOODPECKER; YELLOWBROWED BULBUL; BLACK BULBUL; SPOTTED BABBLER; SCIMITAR BABBLER; QUAKER BABBLER; BROWN FLYCATCHER; GREYHEADED FLYCATCHER; BLYTH'S REED WARBLER; BOOTED WARBLER; TYTLER'S LEAF WARBLER; TICKELL'S LEAF WARBLER; GREENISH LEAF WARBLER; YELLOWBROWED LEAF WARBLER; LARGE CROWNED LEAF WARBLER; BLUE CHAT; BLUE ROCK TRUSH; MALABAR WHISTLING THRUSH; BLACKBIRD; YELLOWCHEEKED TIT; GREY WAGTAIL; PLAINCOLOURED

FLOWERPECKER; SMALL SUNBIRD; YELLOWBACKED SUNBIRD; COMMON ROSEFINCH.

NASHIK DISTRICT

Gangapur Dam (BR, NB, SG, SR)

BRAHMINY DUCK 29.3: 6; BLACKEARED KITE 13.3: 4; LONGBILLED VULTURES 13.3: 65 soaring; MONTAGU'S HARRIER 30.3: 2; REDHEADED MERLIN 13.3: 2. One flying just above the ground and the other 10m above it; GREY PARTRIDGE 2.3: CB 2 ad., 5 yng; JUNGLE BUSH QUAIL 13.3: CB, 4 ad., 6 yng; DEMOISELLE CRANE 27.3: 130; INDIAN COURSER 20.3: CB, 2 ad., 2 yng, a day old. Both ads feeding yng. During afternoon 1 ad., tucked both chicks under spread-out wings to shelter from sun (for 2hrs). 26.3: CB, 2 Ad 1 yng; BLACKHEADED GULL 13.3: 40; LITTLE BROWN DOVE 10.3: CB, 1 N, 1 egg; ASHYCROWNED FINCH-LARK 10.3: PRB, F const., N; SYKES' CRESTED LARK 13.3: 8; GREY SHRIKE 2.3: CB, N with 4 eggs on *Acacia leucophloea* 10' up. 13.5: CB, 1 N., 1 yng, 3 eggs (incubation 14 days); COLLARED BUSH CHAT 13.3: 10; INDIAN ROBIN 13.3: CB, 1 N between stone debris, 1 yng, 1 egg; PADDYFIELD PIPIT 13.3: 4; TAWNY PIPIT 13.3: 6. BLACKHEADED YELLOW WAGTAIL 13.3: 20; BLACKHEADED BUNTING 13.3; REDHEADED BUNTING 13.3: 40[@]; GREYNECKED BUNTING 13.3: 8.

Ozar (H.A.L. Factory) (BR, NB, SG)

GREY PARTRIDGE 15.3: CB 2 ad., 3 yng; GREAT INDIAN BUSTARD 15.3: 4. 23.3: 3 in flight; COMMON INDIAN NIGHTJAR 1.

PUNJAB

FEROJEPUR DISTRICT

Harike 2.2 (HS)

YELLOWBROWED LEAF WARBLER* 1.

TAMIL NADU

NILGIRIS DISTRICT

Masinagudi 31.5 (AM)

INDIAN ROBIN PRB, freq., trips to hollow pipe in hedge *c.* 4' from ground.

ABBREVIATIONS: Ab-abundant; ad-adult/s; br-breeding; C-common/ly; CB-confirmed breeding; const-construction/ing; *c.*-approximately; disp-display/ing; F-female; flt-flight; fly-family; freq-frequent/ly; hrd-heard; id-identify/ied; imm-immature; inc-include/ing; Is-Island; juv-juvenile; LM-local migrant; M-male; mat-material; N-nest/ing/s; POB-possible breeding; PRB-probable breeding; plm-plumage; RF-Reserve Forest; Resp-respectively; Tlk-Taluk; vil-village; WL-wildlife; yng-young.

CONTRIBUTORS: A. Madhusudan (AM); EH Rao (EHR); H Sangha (HS); JN Prasasd (JNP); N Bhure (NB); N Jamdar (NJ); NR Swamy (NRS); PA Ullas (PAU); RB Naik (RBK); R Mathew (RM); S Gudsoorkar (SG); S Hameed (SH); S Karthikeyan (SK); S Prasad (SP); S Ranade (SR); S Subramanya (SS); Sanjay B (SB); YR Siddarth (YRS).

NOTES: [1]Detailed checklists are available from Hon. Secretary.

[2] Extends the known distribution range in Andhra Pradesh.

[#] Temperature 17°C-30°C. Habitat: Evergreen forest, with steep hillsides.

[@]Mixed flock of Redheaded & Blackheaded Buntings.

**Phylloscopus inornatus humei*.

ERRATA: *Pitta* # 97: 6: Under Punjab, Harike is in Ferojepur District (*not* Gurdaspur) & Rababsar in Kapurthala Dist. Under Rajasthan, Sambhar Lake is in Jaipur Dist. (*not* Sawai Madhopur). The error is regretted.

REGIONAL REFEREES: Andhra Pradesh: A Pittie; Goa: H Lainer; Haryana: H Sangha; Karnataka: JN Prasad; Kerala: PO Nameer; Maharashtra: N Jamdar; Punjab: H Sangha; Rajasthan: H Sangha; Tamil Nadu: V Santharam.

CONTACT CALLS

"Thanks for *Pitta* # 98. How about a bigger type, even if quantity is reduced? But the issues are all very worthwhile."

—**Zafar Futehally**, Bangalore.

"The new bold font for headings is very nice…The new species data given is very exciting and important. But, it is extremely wrong of you not to have given the AUTHORS of these new names! … As habitats are shrinking man is now able to find these yet undiscovered birds, as the area to search has become less! … I see your BIRDING NOTES section is 'conquering' more States—Punjab, Rajasthan and Pondicherry. Priya Davidar could be made your Regional Referee from Pondy. I would also like PITTA to include brief CORRESPONDENCE from members regularly. This Bulletin is really improving by leaps and bounds, … and I only wish you find the funds (and many more members) to expand it and include critical data." — **Dr Kumar Ghorpadé**, Bangalore.

[**EDITORS' NOTE:** Though the source for the section on New Species in *Pitta* # 98 p. 1 does not give authors, we have been able to retrieve this information for some of the species from the following URL http://www.itc.nl/~deby/SM/NewSpecies.html on the Internet, maintained by Rolf A. de By. These are given below.

- **Sangihe Scops Owl** *Otus collari* Frank R. Lambert & Pamela C. Rasmussen 1998.
- **Barlow's Lark** *Certhilauda barlowi* Peter G Ryan, Ian Hood, Paulette Bloomer, Joris Komen & Timothy M. Crow 1998.
- **Black-crowned Barwing** *Actinodura sodangorum* Peter G. Ryan, Ian Hood, Paulette Bloomer, Joris Komen, Timothy M. Crow & Roland Eve 1999.
- **Golden-winged Laughingthrush** *Garrulax ngoclinensis* Johanathan C Eames, Le Tong Trai & Nguyen Cu 1999.

Please refer *Pitta* # 94 p. 1 for the following:

- **Moheli Scops Owl** *Otus moheliensis* René-Marie Lafontaine & Nathalie Moulaert 1998.
- **Nicobar Scops Owl** *O. alius* Pamela C. Rasmussen 1998.
- **Talaud Bush Hen** *Amaurornis magnirostris* Frank R. Lambert 1998.
- **Ancient Antwren** *Herpsilochmus gentryi* Bret M. Whitney & José Alvarez Alonso 1998.]

For Private Circulation Only

For more information, write to: Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh, PO Box 45, Banjara Hills PO, Hyderabad 500034, India.
Editors: Aasheesh Pittie (3350683) & Siraj A Taher (3352607) **E-mail**: AASHEESH@HD1.VSNL.NET.IN
Membership (Rs): Admission=20; Ordinary=100, Student=25 per annum; Life=1,000. *Outstation cheques not accepted.*

PITTA

Bulletin of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh No. 100 : August 1999

31.VI 1996

PROGRAMME

Indexed 14-2-2001

FIELD OUTING: 8-8-1999: Anantgiri Hills, Vikarabad, Rangareddi District: We request members with personal transport, willing to accommodate people, to volunteer and inform the Hon. Secretayr and make the trip a success for all. Seats will be reserved on first booked basis and vehicles will start from Shanbhag Hotel, Panjagutta X roads at 7am sharp. District buses to Tandur stop at Anantgiri. All are requested to assemble near Anantgiri bus stand, by 8.00am. This will be a full-day trip. Bring rainwear if necessary, water and food.
INDOOR MEETING: 16-8-1999, 6 p.m.: Talk by Y. Malini. Vidyaranya High School, Opp., Secretariat, Saifabad, Hyderabad 500004.

EDITORIAL

This, the 100th issue, is a small milestone for *Pitta*. *Pitta* was started in December 1987 as a single-sheet (2 pages) Newsletter, primarily to inform members about the programme of the Society and provide some additional reading matter in the form of News. There have been several bumps on this journey. On 9 occassions *Pitta* was published as a combined issue for 2 or more months—May-November 1990 being the longest period! *Pitta* was not published at all for 33 months from October 1991 to June 1994 and again for 7 months from November 1994 to May 1995. Our first 4-page bulletin was the combined Jan-May 1996 # 57-61 issue and the first 6-page issue was # 93 in January 1999. Though the serial numbering of the issues has been maintained, a single oversight with the January 1987 issue, which was not published and should have been # 2, has delayed the centenary issue by a month. In all 78 issues of *Pitta* have been actually published. With this issue we have added 2 more pages, making *Pitta* an 8-page Newsletter.

Dr Kumar Ghorpadé began a column on Indian Ornithology in October 1996 (# 66), that has now appeared 28 times. He briefly covered the history of Indian Ornithology and is now reviewing the taxonomy of Indian birds, after which he will go on to their biogeography, biology, phylogeny, *etc*. Our *Birding Notes* column was commenced in June 1997 (# 74) and has drawn inputs from many bird-watchers of the 9 Indian States we cover. We plan to publish annual consolidated reports based on this column in future issues of *Mayura*. A *Calendar of Events* was published in July 1999 (# 99) and we hope to inform you about forthcoming national and international birding events through it. With this issue we introduce 3 new columns on identification, endangered species profiles and a bird-watcher's dictionary.

We would like to place on record our personal appreciation and gratitude to all contributors and critics without whose support *Pitta* would not have been what it is today, BSAP's own ambassador to the birding world! —*Aasheesh Pittie & Siraj A. Taher*

NOTES & NEWS

Happenings at the Society

Field Trip to Mahavir Harin Vanasthali—13.6.99

Humayun Taher

It was a cool and cloudy morning, fortunately not raining, as the members of the BSAP assembled at the gates of the Mahavir Harin Vanasthali. Even before we started, we had notched up some interesting species of birds like Peafowl, Stone Curlews and Short-toed Eagle.

After some initial trouble we managed to persuade the forest guards to open the gates and allow us entry. The thing that struck all of us immediately was the complete lack of grass in the park. It was completely bare stony ground. However, following recent showers, trees were bursting into bloom and putting out multi-coloured flowers and fresh green leaves.

We proceeded along the game trail laid out through the park. At one point a Hawk Cuckoo started calling to our right. Malini immediately decided that she wanted to see this elusive bird, come hell or high water. But the Cuckoo wasn't having any. It kept just one call away and after about 15 minutes we were all ready to swear that it knew ventriloquism. The calls seemed to come from every direction! At last, an incautious flutter of wings gave it away, much to Malini's delight. We pushed on.

A little further away, a Small Greenbilled Malkoha was pointed out by Biju and "Ooh's" and "Aah's" filled the air. In the rear, Humayun, hastening up to see what the excitement was about, flushed a Ring Dove that obligingly flew over the group and landed on a tree where everyone could have a good look.

The Assistant Range Officer (ARO) now put in an appearance and, at his insistence we moved on to one of the feeding points for the deer in the park. On the way, a Tree Pie was spotted and the "Ooh's" and "Aah's" started all over again. Not, I must say, without reason.

We all sat down on handy rocks and awaited the coming of the feed van that would, presumably, tempt the elusive Chital and Blackbuck into the open. The photographers went over their cameras. Some of them, in fact, were already in action on a nest of an Indian Robin. The van appeared and the cameramen checked their cameras some more and tensed in anticipation. The ARO however, seemed to think that it would be better to drive in the van to some of the other feeding points where the deer were already feasting. Realizing the soundness of this advice, we accordingly climbed into the van and set off.

At the first feeding station, we were able to see about 50 plus Chital and a couple of Blackbuck gorging themselves. The van

stopped and cameras started to click, accompanied by breathless exclamations of admiration at the beauty of the noble animals. I must say that I shared this view because, in my opinion, the Chital is one of the most handsome deer in the world.

We drove on and saw several more herds of deer at feeding stations. Apparently, due to the lack of grass, the animals depend heavily on the supplied feed for sustenance. The park is also quite heavily overpopulated with ungulates and the ARO said that the population is some 200 plus Blackbuck and 500 plus Chital. It appears that the park has been almost too successful and the huge herds of deer have eaten out the natural grazing in the park. We couldn't help wondering aloud whether it would not be an idea to cull the animals and feed the meat so obtained to the carnivores in the local zoo!

The main gate came into view, signaling the end of our birding. It was a fairly good day with wonderful weather and a decent list of birds. The large gathering of members had certainly enjoyed themselves and the younger set in particular was thrilled at the sightings of the Chital and Blackbuck.

Indoor Meeting: Kanha National Park

M.S. Kulkarni

Aasheesh Pittie, who has been visiting the famous tiger reserve Kanha National Park, since last two years, spoke on the present status of the park with reference to frequent forest fires. He informed members that he has seen 120 species of birds in the park and some wildlife like tiger (from elephant-back), chital and wild boar. Many quality slides of Kanha's habitats including wildlife were shown. Some slides of recent forest fires were heart rending. We just cannot imagine in such incidents the pathetic and helpless condition of suffering wildlife. The speaker also urged the audience to visit the national park, as it is near Nagpur and the cost is quite reasonable.

Wildlife Art Show: WASH-2000

As we enter the new millennium, the state of our environment is attracting greater attention from a world that realizes that the health of the people inhabiting this earth hinges on the health of the environment. Life forms, primarily wildlife, have been used since ages as the litmus for a healthy environment. The visual impact of our wildlife has often been conveyed through the medium of photography and cinematography, but wildlife art has been left behind. It is still in its infancy in India

To promote wildlife art and provide an impetus to wildlife artists of the country, the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh is planning to hold an exhibition of wildlife paintings from 14-16 January 2000 in Hyderabad along with a Workshop (17 January 2000) for participating artists that will be conducted by a reputed wildlife painter or illustrator.

The purpose is to provide the citizens of Hyderabad access to wildlife through paintings, further encourage and underscore the need for conservation and also provide encouragement to wildlife artists. The workshop is also intended to serve as a platform for wildlife artists to exchange ideas and learn from each other.

The exhibition will display 3 paintings each of 10 artists, selected by the organizers on the basis of 5 works that must be submitted before 7th November 1999 to the address given below.

Artists who are keen to participate should contact Honorary Secretary, Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh, PO Box 45, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad 500034 at the earliest. Phone: 040-3350683 (Aasheesh Pittie). E-mail: aasheesh@hd1.vsnl.net.in.

Job Offer

Here's a good offer from the Centre for Herpetology, Madras Crocodile Bank, Post Bag # 4, Mamallapuram 603104, Tamil Nadu (run by Rom Whitaker), for a Projects Coordinator. Please send a post-paid envelope for the job-profile to the address at the end of this bulletin or directly to Madras Croc. Bank. An initial salary of Rs 15,000 per month plus insurance and accommodation is being offered. Knowledge about reptiles is not required, as it is an administrative job.

Birds in Agricultural Ecosystem

The Society for Applied Ornithology (India) has published the proceedings of a 3-day symposium held in December 1994 at Hyderabad, on 'Birds in Agricultural Ecosystem'. This volume consists of articles on feeding ecology, bird pests and their management, breeding ecology, avian community, bird conservation, birds as insect pest management agents and bird physiology—from different agro-ecosystems in the country. There are papers on the feeding and breeding ecology of Barn Owl *Tyto alba*, Whitebreasted Kingfisher *Halcyon smyrnensis*, *etc.*, conservation of birds of agricultural importance, community analysis, population fluctuations and physiology of birds. Emphasis has been given to various bird pests of important commercial crops of India and their management. The traditional methods of crop protection by tribals is also discussed with illustrations. Copies of—Dhindsa, Manjit S., P. Syamsunder Rao & B.M. Parasharya (*Ed.*) (1998): Birds in Agricultural Ecosystem. Pages 196. Society for Applied Ornithology (India). Price Rs. 300 + 25 (postage)—can be ordered from Dr P. Syamsunder Rao, Insectary Buildings, Veterinary College Campus, Rajendranagar, Hyderabad 500030, India. E-mail: agriorni@hd2.dot.net.in.

Donations of Pictures

The Society has received wonderful slides from Roy Sebastian and prints from Ramudu, taken on the trip to Manjira Reservoir. We thank them heartily for their generosity.

Calendar of Events

July-December 1999: 1st Sunday of every month: BSAP's Gardens & Semi-wilderness Area Surveys. The project continues for another 6 months. Fortnightly surveys reduced to monthly. Further details from 'KC' (3751652) / H Taher (3352607).

BNHS Programmes (Complete details from BNHS 022-2821811. Camps for members of BNHS, nature-walks & talks open to all):

11.vii Borivli National Park (main gate) 7.00am—nature walk.

29.vii BNHS 6.30pm: AVP on Corbett National Park.

19.viii BNHS 6.30pm: AVP on Living Forests.

23.viii-2.ix BNHS First batch of Bird Banding Training Programme for 1999-2000 season[1].

26.viii BNHS 6.30pm: AVP on Monsoon in Melghat.

2-3.x.1999: World Birdwatch'99.

1st week October 1999: Wildlife week.

12.11.1999: Sálim Ali Bird Count—organized by BNHS.

23.9.2000—1.10.2000, Nepal: International Symposium on Galliformes. Info., from Prof. A.H. Musavi, Secretary, W.P.A. India, 6 Kabeer Colony, Anoop Shahar Road, Aligarh 202002.

[1] Seven batches in all up to 9.iv.2000. See p. 7 for further details.

Continued on page 7...

LETTER FROM AN INSECT-HUNTING ORNITHOLOGIST—28

"We present here a classification and geographical atlas of the class Aves . . . . . It embraces all fossil, lately extinct and living birds known to us.

"The theoretical object of biological classification is to arrange the forms in an order representing their 'natural' relationship . . . . a classification made thus should end up with a list proceeding from the most 'primitive' to most 'advanced'.

"This treatment is, indeed, ideal. The trouble is that the fossils are but a tiny sample of the birds of the past . . . . . So we have to make do with what we have got, and arrive at a practical classification. Any such classification is based partly on guesswork, but without some system no birds could be arranged, and no decent research could start.

"The species is the only unit which is strictly definable; all other categories from genus up to class [and also subspecies! —KG] are made by man for his convenience, and hallowed by long use and careful judgement" [but not subspecies—KG].

[J. Fisher & R.T. Peterson, 1964, The World of Birds, p. 144]

"A family tree is often used to indicate the relationships among a group of birds. For birds as a whole a shrubby tree would represent the class Aves. The main branches would be the orders, the small branches the families, the twigs genera, and the leaves the species. When these groups are reduced to lineal lists, an attempt is made to start with the most primitive and to place nearest relations next to each other.

"The resulting simplicity of arrangements provides a clarity and definiteness that is inherent in the system, but also obscures the many uncertainties and gaps in our knowledge. The idealized family tree well illustrates how birds must have arisen. If we had samples of all the species that have ever existed, the family tree, or phylogeny, could be accurately reconstructed.

"But the data we have to work with are the present-day species, some ten thousand of them, plus some 834 known fossil species. This last, the known fossil species, are but a miniscule fraction, about 0.05 per cent, of those that probably existed. Consider the problem one would have in reconstructing the shape of a banyan tree if one had only a narrow section through the top of the tree — many leaves and twigs, and a few bits of branches — representing present-day birds, and a few slices of the larger limbs and trunk, representing the fossil birds. Small wonder that our knowledge of the phylogeny within the class Aves is so uncertain."

[Austin L. Rand, 1967, Ornithology: An Introduction, pp. 270-272]

From this Letter on (in the *Pitta* century issue!), until I complete my synoptic analysis of the Indian Avifauna (Passeriformes), I will quote sections of the works of some accomplished ornithologists who have had a lifetime's experience with bird taxonomy. I hope these quotations will serve to enlighten amateur (and 'professional') bird watchers in our sub-continent about the real situation with the classification and phylogeny of the Class Aves. This 'new' DNA-DNA hybridization based reconstruction of the phylogenetic 'tapestry' of birds, to my mind, needs thorough and critical analysis by established bird taxonomists the world over. There have been several opinions espoused by leading ornithologists that have already appeared in scientific print, but I have yet to gain access to most of the better reviews and study their contents. Until I am able to find the time to do that I implore amateurs in our sub-continent (and elsewhere) not to mutely accept the Sibley & Monroe sequence but to kindly stick to the old Wetmore one, which is familiar to most of us through Ripley's local publications. Sálim Ali was no taxonomist and I am not aware of any inputs he may have offered, based on his field experience (which *was* extensive) to his collaborator, S.D. Ripley when both of them were working on the INDIAN HANDBOOK volumes. Several of my colleagues want to believe that Ripley's work "is outdated" or "totally out" but I beg to disagree with them. Every scientist builds on the hard work of his predecessors and I think it a pity that some contemporary individuals choose to ignore previous scholarship — Sibley & Monroe is only a so-called "improvement" over Ripley, and Wetmore, not an absolutely independent viewpoint! Some of these persons even want to do away with the names of the taxonomists who were responsible for recognizing and naming our world's biodiversity and giving each organism discovered a reference point (identity) on which data on their forms and lives could be built gradually for our knowledge database!

To go on now with my analysis of our Passeres, the family Alaudidae begins the vast, 'modern' multitude of "singing" birds which have endeared themselves to the human mind and spirit through their melodious voices, which perhaps enticed early man to exercise his own vocal chords! Except for some insects that are, if nothing, marginal songsters, it is only our feathered animals that sing the most, with some variety and complexity as well. Sibley & Monroe place the Larks much higher, as more 'advanced' birds, between the Warblers and the Sunbirds, and this radical re-alignment could possibly be more correct than Wetmore's. Some 75-82 species (in 15-18 genera) have been discovered and described from open, bare, desert and grassland ecosystems everywhere except from the dense jungles of the Malay Archipelago, most of western Australia and all of the Americas. But Larks are known from the Colombian mountains, the extreme south-east of the North American continent, besides from the West Indies as well. Larks have been introduced into New Zealand, Hawaii and some Pacific Ocean islands. Our region has 23 species of mostly resident Larks, which are — 4 Bush Larks (*Mirafra* Horsfield), 5 Finch-Larks (*Eremopterix* Kaup, *Ammomanes* Cabanis), 1 Desert Lark (*Alaemon* Keyserling & Blasius), 5 mainly wintering Short-toed Larks (*Calandrella* Kaup), 2 resident and wintering Calandra Larks (*Melanocorypha* Boie), 1 Horned Lark (*Eremophila* Brehm), 3 Crested Larks (*Galerida* Boie), and 2 Skylarks (*Alauda* Linnaeus) of which one is resident and the other migratory. Of these 23 species (9 genera), the following 6 are endemics in our area — the Madras and Red-winged Bush Larks (*Mirafra affinis*, *M. erythroptera*), Ashy-crowned Finch-Lark (*Eremopterix grisea*), Rufous-tailed Finch-Lark (*Ammomanes phoenicurus*), and the Malabar and Sykes' Crested Larks (*Galerida malabarica*, *G. deva*).

The Swallows and Martins are classified in the Hirundinidae which occur everywhere except in the extreme arctic, in New Zealand and on the remote oceanic islands. Of the 78 world species (in 17 genera) known, our region possesses 17 resident species (in 3 genera), viz., 9 Swallows and 8 Martins (*Riparia* T. Forster, *Hirundo* Linnaeus, *Delichon* Horsfield & Moore). The following three are endemic here — Jerdon's Swallow (*Hirundo domicola*), Indian Cliff Swallow (*H. fluvicola*), and Blyth's Swallow (*H. hyperythra*).

From the Eurylaimidae and Pittidae to the Emberizidae (or Fringillidae), there is so much variance in the sequence of families, between the Wetmore and the Sibley & Monroe lists (see Table below), that I will only mention the major changes in the Passeriformes, but not go into any detail about them in these Letters. Avian phylogeny is still not fully understood or agreed upon, so let's leave it at that for the time being, shall we?

The Shrikes (Laniidae—13 genera, 81 species), a family of fearsome predators of larger insects and other smaller animals, are special favourites of mine. This is an Old World group of birds which is also Holarctic (except extreme arctic areas) and occurs also in North America. Most definitely of post-Gondwanaland origins, they do not occur in the Neotropical and the Australasian biogeographical regions. In Madagascar, where they are also absent, a related family (Vangidae—9 genera, 13 species) replaces them as their ecological equivalents. However, both families have their representatives in the Comoro Islands that lie in the Mozambique Channel between this extremely interesting island and the African mainland. Only a single genus (*Lanius* Linnaeus), with 14 species, are found as residents, winter visitors or vagrants in our region. There is only one endemic here — a currently recognized "subspecies" of what I think is lumped as *Lanius schach*, the Rufous-backed Shrike — what I call Blyth's Shrike (*L. caniceps*) which inhabits "Dravidia", *viz.*, peninsular India and the island of Ceylon.

The next three families in Ripley's SYNOPSIS sequence have all been transferred to the Corvidae by Sibley & Monroe, as "tribes" of two of the four subfamilies they recognize from the Orient. This is a matter of minor consequence since, as Van Tyne & Berger had opined (see quotation in my Letter # 24), all of the Suborder Passeres could be treated as a single family if we maintained equal standards throughout the Class Aves! The Oriolidae, or the beautifully coloured Orioles, are again continental Old World in distribution, absent from most islands and also deserts and colder areas. Some 25 to 28 species are known from the world and placed in only 2 genera, one of which occurs in the Indian region (*Oriolus* Linnaeus), with 5 species resident (and locally migratory) here, which are also found in other parts of Asia, one of them occurring also in Europe. Sibley & Monroe place the Cuckoo-Shrikes (*Coracina, Lalage*), Minivets (*Pericrocotus*), and the Flycatcher-Shrike (*Hemipus*) also in the Tribe Oriolini of their expanded family Corvidae!

Another family with birds of pugnacious character is the Dicruridae, the mostly pitch black Drongos. The 20 world species are again placed only in 2 genera, one (*Dicrurus* Vieillot) found in our region. A group confined to the Old World tropics, *i.e.*, Africa (including Madagascar), S., E. & SE. Asia, and the Malay Archipelago to New Guinea and N. & NE. Australia, they behave like over-sized flycatchers! Sibley & Monroe place them in the subfamily Dicrurinae (of the Corvidae) along with the Monarch, Paradise and Fan-tailed Flycatchers, which is perhaps a more correct affiliation. Some 11 species breed in our region, of which 3 are endemic — the White-bellied Drongo (*Dicrurus caerulescens*), the Andamans Drongo (*D. andamanensis*), and the Ceylon Crested Drongo (*D. lophorinus*).

THE SIBLEY & MONROE 'TAPESTRY' OF THE ORDER PASSERIFORMES IN THE INDIAN REGION

Pittidae
Eurylaimidae
Irenidae
Laniidae
Corvidae
  Pachycephalinae
  Corvinae
    Corvini
    Artamini
    Oriolini
  Dicrurinae
    Rhipidurini
    Dicrurini
    Monarchini
  Aegithininae
Bombycillidae
Cinclidae
Muscicapidae
  Turdinae
  Muscicapinae
    Muscicapini
    Saxicolini
Sturnidae
Sittidae
  Sittinae
  Tichodrominae
Certhiidae
  Certhiinae
    Certhiini
    Salpornithini
  Troglodytinae
Paridae
  Remizinae
  Parinae
Aegithalidae
Hirundinidae
  Hirundininae
Regulidae
Pycnonotidae
Hypocoliidae
Cisticolidae
Zosteropidae
Sylviidae
  Acrocephalinae
  Megalurinae
  Garrulacinae
  Sylviinae
    Timaliini
    Sylviini
Alaudidae
Nectariniidae
  Nectariniinae
    Dicaeini
    Nectariniini
Passeridae
  Passerinae
  Motacillinae
  Prunellinae
  Ploceinae
  Estrildinae
Fringillidae
  Fringillinae
    Fringillini
    Carduelini
  Emberizinae

[Addenda: **Letter # 26** — After last line on p. 4 add "The Malabar Trogon (*H. fasciatus*) is our only endemic."]

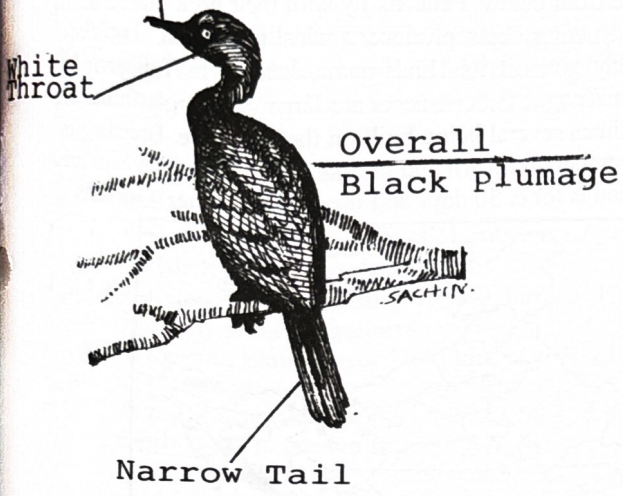
--- **Dr Kumar Ghorpadé**, 1861 Bethel Street, Bangalore 560 043 & e-mail: varanus.kg@mailcity.com

FIELD CRAFT *By* Siraj Taher & Sachin Jaltare

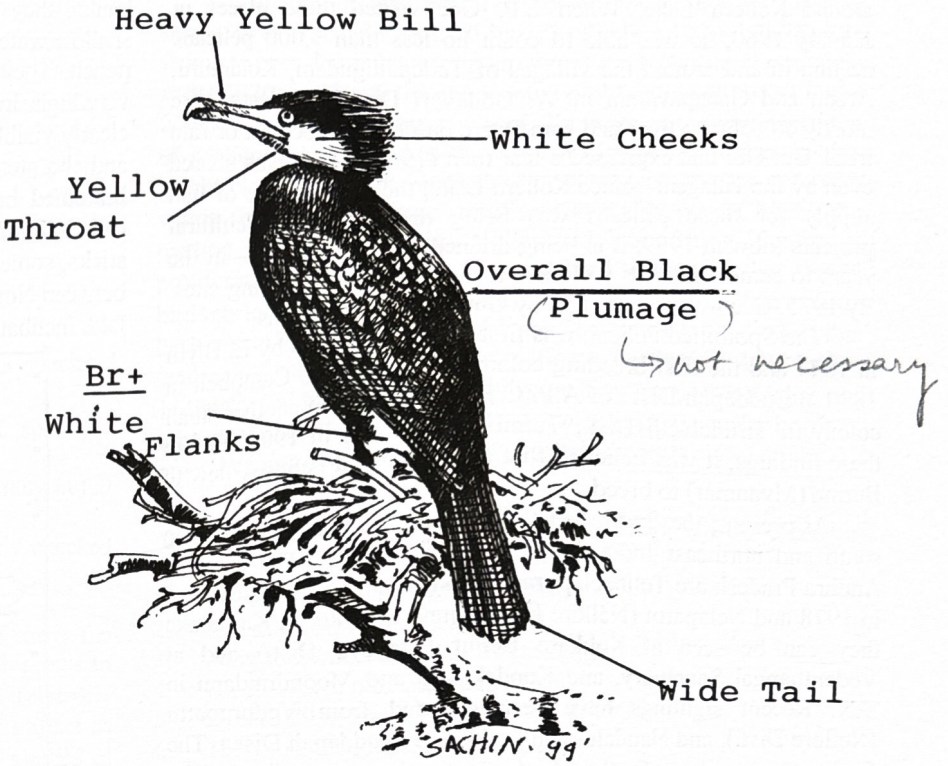
Waterbirds resembling crows.
Often seen with open wings – drying them....
Overall black

1. Not to scale
2. Notes – on computer
3. Page numbering
4. Handwritten pointers

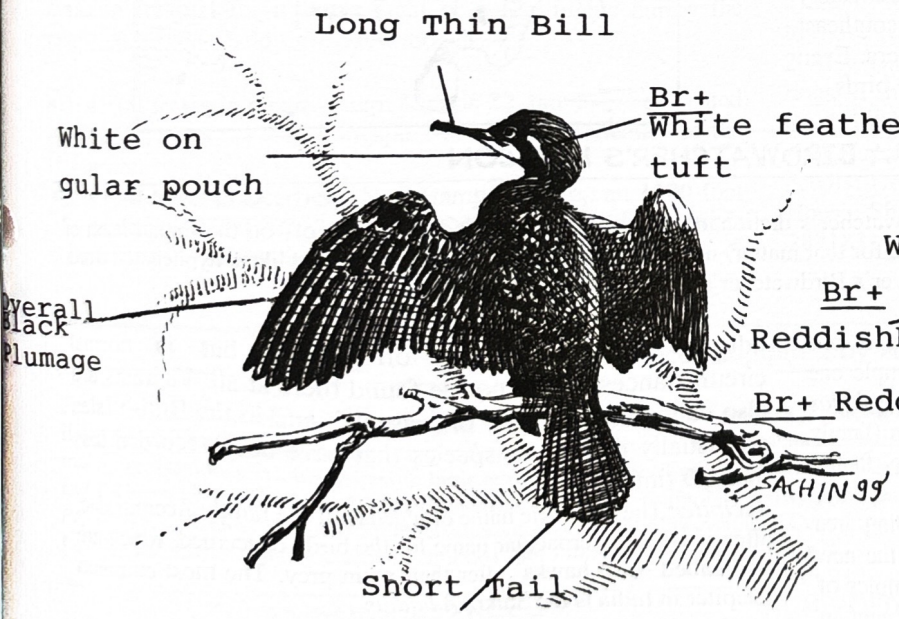
LITTLE CORMORANT



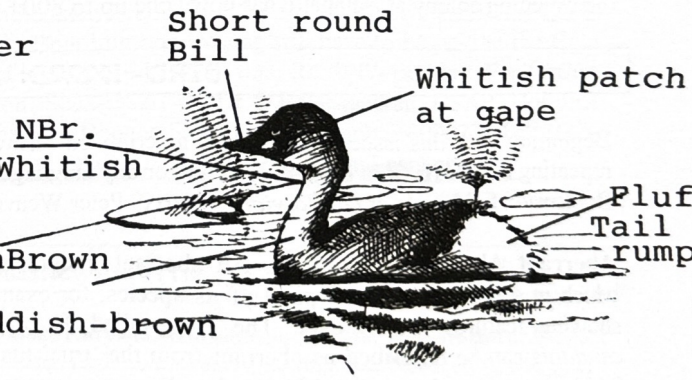
GREAT CORMORANT



↳ not necessary



INDIAN SHAG



LITTLE GREBE

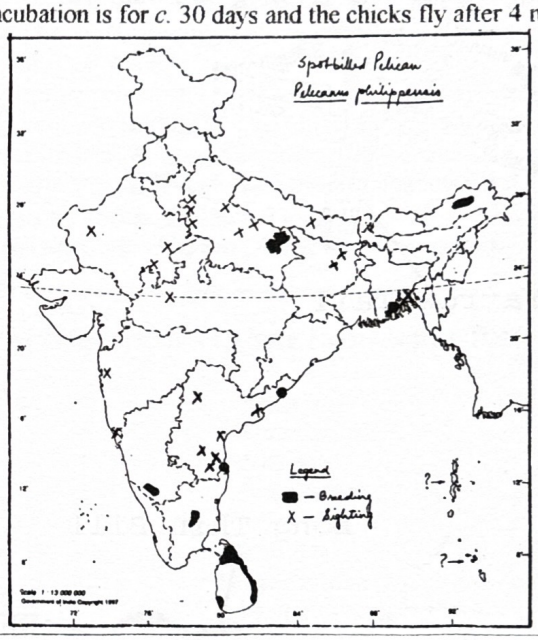
SPOTLIGHT: Spotbilled Pelican *Pelecanus philippensis* By Siraj A. Taher

When S.N. Guttikar visited Kolleru Pelecanries in February 1975, he did not expect to find them deserted by the Spotbilled Pelicans. Discovered by K.K. Neelakantan in 1949, at Aredu, W. Godavari District (Dist.), A.P., where he counted 800 adults and 1,200+ young, it was then the largest known. In 1954-55, B.S. Lamba found many more breeding areas of the Spotbilled Pelican in and around Kolleru Lake. When E.P. Gee visited these places in January 1960, he was able to count no less than 3,000 pelicans nesting in and around the villages of Tadepalligudem, Kolamuru, Aredu and Ganapavaram in W. Godavari Dist. The nests were mostly on palmyra trees and some were on *babool*, coconut or rain trees. But Gee had expressed a fear then (1960) which was shared even by the villagers—since Kolleru Lake, the main source of fish supply for these pelicans was being drained for agricultural projects (now in 1999, it is being drained for aqua farms)—in the years to come, the birds will have to find alternative nesting sites. By 1975, Gee was proved right by Guttikar's observations.

The Spotbilled Pelican was first recorded in India by E. Blyth in 1844 and the first breeding colony noted by W.H. Campbell in 1890 in Cuddapah Dist., of A.P. C.E. Rhenius found another small colony in Tirunelvelli Dist., Tamil Nadu (T.N.) in 1905. Before these findings, it was believed that the Spotbilled Pelicans flew to Burma (Myanmar) to breed.

At present, the Spotbilled Pelican breeds in small pockets in south and northeast India, and coastal Sri Lanka. The areas in Andhra Pradesh are Telineelapuram (Srikakulam Dist.), discovered in 1978 and Nelapattu (Nellore Dist.) found in 1980. In Karnataka they can be seen at Kokkare Bellur (Mandya Dist.) and at Vedanthangal Sanctuary, and Kundakolam and Moondraidapu in T.N. Recent sightings have been reported from Vedurupattu (Nellore Dist.), and Nandalur and Reddipalli (Cuddapah Dist.). The feeding grounds of the birds are also spreading. The Telineelapuram birds going east about 20km to Coringa Sanctuary (E. Godavari Dist.) and the Nelapattu pelicans flying southeast about 15km to Pulicat Lagoon in larger and larger numbers. Even the breeding colony at Nelapattu has now gone up to 800+ birds.

This rather large and heavy bird (vulture+), with short legs and webbed feet, and a bill that is elongated and flattened with large blue-black spots along the edge of the upper mandible. They are found during the non-breeding season throughout India, Sri Lanka and Burma in well-watered areas. Highly gregarious (lives in flocks or communities), floating on the water or resting on river banks, they collectively swim in a semi-circle, driving fish into shallow water where they scoop them into their large dull-purplish pouch. They have a strong and steady flight and sometimes soar very high. In flight, the black wing quills and the brownish tail are clearly visible from below. Pelicans fly with their neck pulled back and the steady wing beats produce a whistling sound. The flat-bottomed body gives it its Hindi name *Jahaaz*. In Telugu it is called *Gooda Konga*. Pelican nests are large, untidy platforms of sticks, sometimes several being built on the same tree. Breeding is between November and April and normally 3 chalky white eggs are laid. Incubation is for *c.* 30 days and the chicks fly after 4 months.



BIRD-*WORD*: A BIRDWATCHER'S LEXICON

Beginning with this issue, we introduce a serialized birdwatcher's dictionary. The title, Bird-*Word*, is a take off on the Indian habit of repeating a word (be it in English or Hindi, or any language for that matter) no sooner it is uttered, making it sound like a hyphenated word. Book-*wuk*, field-*vield* or *chidia-vidia*! *Source*: Peter Weaver's Birdwatcher's Dictionary. © 1981 by Peter Weaver.

Aberrant Abnormal or unusual. An aberrant individual is one which in some way is not typical of its species, for example one showing features of albinism. The Long-tailed Tit *Aegithalos caudatus* can be described as aberrant from the 'true' tits (family Paridae), so much so that it is placed in a separate family (Aegithalidae).

Abmigration Movement of an individual from one breeding area to another by pairing in a winter flock with a bird from the new area and travelling there with it on spring migration. Examples of abmigrants are found in bird groups whose winter flocks contain birds from various breeding grounds mixed together, notably ducks (family Anatidae).

Accentor A member of the family Prunellidae, of which by far the most widespread is the Dunnock *Prunella modularis*. This family of 13 species is the only bird family that is confined to the palearctic region.

Accidental (species) *See* vagrant. [Vagrant: A bird which wanders to a particular area if its orientation is at fault or adverse winds drive it off course but in normal circumstances would not be found there at all. Vagrants are also called 'accidentals' or 'casuals', and in the British Isles are usually defined as species that have been recorded less than 20 times.]

Accipiter The scientific name of a genus of the family Accipitridae, often used as a vernacular name for the birds concerned, which are also called 'bird hawks' after their main prey. The most common accipiter in India is the Shikra *A.badius*.

Acclimatisation The introduction of a species to an area to which it is not native by gradually accustoming individuals to the climate, offering food and shelter where necessary, until a truly self-supporting population has developed.

Adaptation Development of characteristics to fit the environment. As part of the process of evolution, adaptation proceeds by mutation and is closely linked with natural selection. It may lead to adaptive radiation and to convergence.

Continued from page 2.

Towers that kill

There are only a few long-term studies of bird mortality at tall communications towers in North America. All indicate that sizable kills occur on a regular basis, with occurrences depending on specific weather conditions. Consequently, all show a considerable range of numbers killed from year to year - thousands may be killed in one season while only a few dozen the next. Hundreds of short-term studies have been conducted consisting of data gathered from just a single night or over several years. Due to weather variables these studies are less reliable for gauging continental mortality, though they do confirm that kills regularly occur over a wide area of North America, chiefly east of the Rocky Mountains and along the Pacific Coast.

Below is a list of locations of some of North America's long-term studies with the tower height, study period, number of birds killed, and an indication of how regularly the tower was checked.

- 1,010-ft tower near Tallahassee, 42,386 birds / 190 species / checked daily throughout the year.
- 1,000-ft tower in Eau Claire, 121,560 birds / 123 species / checked daily in the migration seasons.
- 1,368-ft tower in Nashville, 19,880 birds / 112 species / checked daily in the migration seasons.
- 850-ft tower in Elmira, over 7500 birds / checked daily in fall migration season.
- 529-ft tower near Weston, 841 birds / 58 species / checked irregularly in the migration seasons.

It is widely agreed that the taller a communication tower the more deadly it is for night-migrating songbirds, but much seems to rely on the tower's location. Evidence suggests that a relatively short tower constructed on a hilltop may have the same impact as higher towers on flat ground. There are no long-term studies at communications towers below 500-ft high. The few accounts available are just for a single night or a few nights during the migration season - below are a few records.

- 420-ft tower in southwestern Kansas 22 Jan 1998: estimated 5000-10000 Lapland Longspurs killed in the vicinity of the tower.
- 436-ft tower in Deerfield, New Hampshire atop an 1100 foot mountain 1959-1960: 267 birds of 45 species (tower grounds checked irregularly during the migration seasons).

Banks (1979) estimated that 1.2 million birds per year were killed by communications towers across the USA. He based this figure on data from three towerkill studies suggesting an annual mortality at tall TV towers of 2,500 birds per tower. The FCC had informed him that there were 1,010 television transmitting stations in the USA as of February 1975 and he figured that, if half of these stations had a mortality like the studies suggested, 1.2 million birds would be killed annually.

Calculating a continental tower mortality now is just as nebulous as when Banks tried back in the late 1970s. The fact is there are even fewer long-term studies at the high towers now than in the 1970s, and with the exponential proliferation of towers in the 200-500 foot height class (95% of all towers on the continent) it is of particular concern that there are no long-term studies in this height class, especially since the few short-term studies at towers within this height indicate significant mortality occurs. Using the method Bank's used in 1979, and considering the great proliferation of new towers, it is not hard to imagine that annual bird mortality at communications towers could be over five million birds a year! But due to the problem of assessing kills, the fact that scavengers often clean up a significant portion of kills before daybreak, and the fact that we have so few long-term studies and none at the shorter towers, the annual mortality could be much larger. We just don't know. [www.towerkill.com]

Bird Banding Training Programme 1999-2000 Season

Bombay Natural History Society

1. 23.viii to 2.ix: Tirupati Hills (AP).
2. 3.ix to 12.ix: Pulicat Lake (AP).
3. 20.ix to 29.ix: Gir / Nalsarovar (Guj).
4. 8.x to 17.x: Point Calimere (TN).
5. 20.x to 29.x: Parambikulam (Kerala).
6. 15.xi to 24.xi: Kabartal (Bihar).
7. 31.iii.2000 to 9.iv.2000: Tirupati (AP).

Training for 20 days is compulsory and certificates will be issued to those who complete a 20-day course. The registration fee for a 20-day camp is Rs. 1,000/- inclusive of training materials and rings. If the course is split into 2 parts of 10 days each, this fee is Rs. 1,500/-. Boarding and lodging will have to be paid at the field station and should not be more than Rs. 100/- per day. For further details: Hon. Sec., BSAP or Dr S Balachandran, BSAP, Hornbill House, Shaheed Bhagar Singh Road, Mumbai 400023. Tel: 022-2821811. Fax: 2837615. Email: bnhs@bom4.vsnl.net.in.

BIRDING NOTES Compiled by Aasheesh Pittie

This column publishes birding notes in brief telegraphic form, from **Andhra Pradesh, Goa, Haryana, Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra, Punjab, Rajasthan & Tamil Nadu** on interesting and significant sightings and behaviour like breeding, feeding, migration, nesting, etc. Notes on flowering and fruiting trees and their relationship with birds are also welcome. English names and classification follow, S.D. Ripley's *A Synopsis of the Birds of India and Pakistan* (1982, 2nd ed.) and scientific nomenclature, T. Inskipp, N. Lindsey & W. Duckworth's *An Annotated Checklist of the Birds of the Oriental Region* (1996). Unless specified, all observations are for 1999. Abbreviations, Contributors, Notes, Regional Referees, *etc.*, are at the end. For selection of breeding criteria 'Probable, Possible, Confirmed', see *Pitta* # 82, February 1998, p. 4.

ANDHRA PRADESH

CUDDAPAH DISTRICT (KG, SR)

Cuddapah 29.v: S. of Cuddapah in dry stony thorn scrub with mango (*Mangifera indica*) orchard.

EURASIAN SPARROW-HAWK 1 ?; RING DOVE many; SMALL GREENBILLED MALKOHA 1; SMALL MINIVET pair; WHITE-HEADED BABBLER, many; JUNGLE WREN-WARBLER POB 1 singing.

30.v: In mixed dry deciduous and thorn jungle on hill range further S. of Cuddapah.

ASHY SWALLOW-SHRIKE many; WHITEBROWED BULBUL 1; RUFOUSBELLIED BABBLER[1] 6 in flock in dense vegetation; WHITEBROWED FANTAIL FLYCATCHER 2; PARADISE FLYCATCHER 1 ad., white M; TICKELL'S FLOWERPECKER several, calling.

Maspalle Village 29.v: On banks of Penner river with some flowing water.
DARTER 1; LITTLE RINGED PLOVER 1; KENTISH PLOVER 2; PALM SWIFT many; LESSER PIED KINGFISHER 1.
[[1]Whitethroated race *Dumetia h. albogularis*.]

MEDAK DISTRICT
ICRISAT Campus vii records except where stated otherwise (SQ)
OPENBILL STORK 23.vi: 14; REDWATTLED LAPWING 24.vi: CB, N with 4 eggs. 8: CB, ad., & 1 chick (different N); BROWN CRAKE 25.vi: CB, pair with 1 chick; PIED CRESTED CUCKOO 17: CB, 1 chick in large grey babbler N (see below); SMALL GREEN-BILLED MALKOHA 24: POB, with worm-like animal in beak–flew off with this after perching for a few minutes; LARGE GREY BABBLER 17: CB, N with a "sisterhood" in attendance. 1 pied crested cuckoo chick in it—almost fledged; STREAKED FANTAIL WARBLER 21: CB, N with 5 eggs; PLAIN WREN WARBLER 17: CB, N with 3 hatchlings & 2 eggs. 27: CB, N with 4 eggs; JUNGLE WREN WARBLER 24: POB, const., N.

KARNATAKA

BANGALORE DISTRICT

- **Big Banyan Tree** 9.v
LARGE CORMORANT 3 flying towards Bangalore (PAU, SB); INDIAN MYNA POB, entering a hole. Carrying leaf into another hole. CB, an eggshell (Myna) was found under the tree (JNP); JUNGLE MYNA POB, entering a hole (JNP).
Cubbon Park, Bangalore City (JNP)
INDIAN MYNA 27.vi: CB, ad., feeding a fledgeling; JUNGLE CROW 6.vi: Const., N on Mast tree *Polyalthia longifolia c.* 8m up.
- **Jayanagar, Bangalore City** 23.xi.1998 (UR)
BLACKBACKED WOODPECKER M [Woodpeckers are almost extinct in Bangalore city–few are found far away from city]
Lalbagh, Bangalore City 23.v (JNP)
PURPLE MOORHEN CB, 2 ads., with 1 yng each; COOT PRB, N under const; JUNGLE CROW with white primaries; MAGPIE-ROBIN PRB, M carrying earthworm.
- **Manchanabele Dam** 9.v
DARTER 1; (JNP); SHORT-TOED EAGLE 1 (JNP); WHITEBREASTED KINGFISHER nest with 1 yng, N more than 1m deep. Remains of beetles were found inside hole (SS). 16.v: CB, ad., brought lizard to feed yng (AR); REDRUMPED SWALLOW PRB, carrying moist mud in bill (JNP); INDIAN WREN WARBLER POB, disp., (JNP); ASHY WREN WARBLER POB, disp., (JNP);
Sadashivnagar, Bangalore City (S, VRR)
WHITEHEADED BABBLER 31.i: CB, N with 3 yng at *c.* 4' up in Hibiscus bush. 2.ii: abandoned N, missing nestlings; PURPLE SUNBIRD 8.i: CB, const., N *c.* 3m up in *Hibiscus rosasinensis* bush. 13.i: N completed. 31.i: 2 yng.

BIJAPUR DISTRICT
Mudhol 28.vi (RBN)
INDIAN MYNA CB, ad., feeding yng in N *c.* 12' up Banyan tree.

KERALA

IDUKKI DISTRICT
Munnar 19-23.v (RM)
RED SPURFOWL; PAINTED SPURFOWL; GREY JUNGLEFOWL; GREEN IMPERIAL PIGEON; NILGIRI WOOD PIGEON; IMPERIAL PIGEON; EMERALD DOVE; WHITEBREASTED KINGFISHER; MALABAR TROGON; HOOPOE; MALABAR GREY HORNBILL; GREAT BLACK WOODPECKER; BLACKHEADED ORIOLE; GREYHEADED MYNA; HILL MYNA; INDIAN TREE PIE; FAIRY BLUEBIRD; REDVENTED BULBUL; SLATYHEADED SCIMITAR BABBLER; WYNAAD LAUGHING THRUSH; YELLOWCHEEKED TIT; WHITE-EYE.

ABBREVIATIONS: ?-doubtful/unconfirmed; Ab-abundant; ad-adult/s; br-breeding; C-common/ly; CB-confirmed breeding; const-construction/ing; *c.*-approxim-ately; disp-display/ing; F-female; flt-flight; fly-family; freq-frequent/ly; hrd-heard; id-identify/ied; imm-immature; inc-include/ing; Is-Island; juv-juvenile; LM-local migrant; M-male; mat-material; N-nest/ing/s; POB-possible breeding; PRB-probable breeding; plm-plumage; RF-Reserve Forest; Resp-respectively; Tlk-Taluk; vil-village; WL-wildlife; yng-young.

CONTRIBUTORS: Arvind R (AR); JN Prasad (JNP); K Ghorpadé (KG); PA Ullas (PAU); RB Naik (RBN); R Mathew (RM); S Balanchandran (SB); S Quader (SQ); S Riyazuddin (SR); S Subramanya (SS); Sindhu (S); U Ramaiah (UR); VR Rao (VRR);

ERRATA: *Pitta* # 99: 5: Under Maharashtra, Mahabaleshwar is in Satara District.

REGIONAL REFEREES: Andhra Pradesh: A Pittie; Goa: H Lainer; Haryana: H Sangha; Karnataka: JN Prasad; Kerala: PO Nameer; Maharashtra: N Jamdar; Punjab: H Sangha; Rajasthan: H Sangha; Tamil Nadu: V Santharam.

CONTACT CALLS

"I think it would be a good idea to aim (*Pitta*) at Hyderabadis. There is nothing more interesting for a man than to be told about what is happening in his immediate neighbourhood. SH Prater in his famous address on wild life conservation, during the BNHS Centenary in 1933, complained that nature study in India was taught with reference to polar bears and robin redbreast, 'while teaching him nothing about his immediate environment' or words to that effect…So much good literature is available you say. Your role should be of a guide, not a supplier of material."
— **Zafar Futehally**, Bangalore.

"Just received No 99: July 1999 *Pitta*. So well produced! Congratulations. The serialised 'Letter from an insect-hunting ornithologist' is extremely well written, erudite and something which might be worth compiling and keeping. If the *Pitta* is getting interesting it is disappointing for me to find that there seems to be less and less from AP which suggests only one thing that your Society members, like their counterparts elsewhere are not regularly going out and if they are, are not writing; be what may, Andhra Pradesh, which is as large as any country elsewhere, is throwing up news and information hardly amounting to four inches of one column (p. 5). No! Do shake up your fellow birders. Lets have more coverage of your area."
— **Lavkumar Khacher**, Gandhinagar.

For Private Circulation Only

For more information, write to: Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh, PO Box 45, Banjara Hills PO, Hyderabad 500034, India.
Editors: Aasheesh Pittie (3350683) & Siraj A Taher (3352607) **E-mail**: AASHEESH@HD1.VSNL.NET.IN
Membership (Rs): Admission=20; Ordinary=100, Student=25 per annum; Life=1,000. *Outstation cheques not accepted.*

PITTA

Bulletin of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh No. 101 : September 199-

25.VIII 1999

PROGRAMME

FIELD OUTING: 12-ix-1999: Shamirpet Lake: Members are requested to assemble in tourist complex lounge, by 7.30am. This will be a half-day trip. Bring rainwear if necessary. Further details from Aasheesh Pittie (3350683) / Siraj Taher (3352607).

INDOOR MEETING: 20-ix-1999, 6 p.m.: Talk by S. Ashok Kumar on his tour of four wildlife sanctuaries in Gujarat. Vidyaranya High School. Opp., Secretariat, Saifabad, Hyderabad 500004.

NOTES & NEWS

Happenings at the Society
Field Trip to Anantgiri—8.viii.1999

Humayun Taher

The drive to Anantgiri was pleasant with glorious weather all day. Just before we reached the valley where we would start birding, K.C. in the leading car spotted an injured squirrel on the road. It was retrieved and taken to the nearby TB Sanatorium for first aid. This created a small sensation at the hospital! After swabbing the wounds with antiseptic, I was carrying the invalid back to the car, when it bit me sharply on the finger and effected its escape*. Refreshed and invigorated with this "Good Samaritan" stuff, we proceeded with the birding.

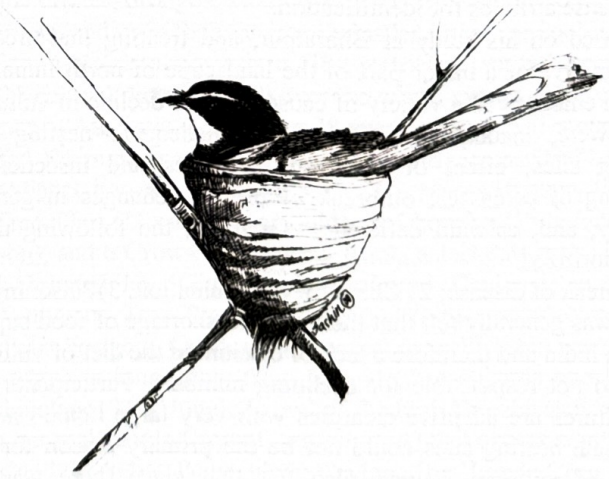
There was quite a bit of activity in the valley and birds were everywhere. We notched up Small Minivets and Whitebrowed Fantail Flycatchers right away. A pair of Tickell's Blue Flycatchers was feeding a family of four. A Redvented Bulbul flew out of a nest containing 4 eggs. Further away, we observed a Grey Tit and close by, a Whitebellied Drongo which gave us a good view as it perched on a bare branch close by. A female Iora also put in an appearance and was greeted with great delight by all.

Looking for a path through the thick undergrowth, I flushed a Whitethroated Ground Thrush that flew away rather hastily and was not so eager to put in a re-appearance. Rufousbellied Babblers appeared in its place and up in the trees a White-eye was active. Further up the path, a solitary figure, was identified as Vinay Totawar who had duped us all by putting in an appearance in the small hours and enjoying a wonderful morning of birding while the rest of us were still *en-route*. He pointed out a nest of a Whitespotted Fantail Flycatcher with the bird incubating. This immediately gave the photographers a stationary subject for a change and they were soon clicking away happily. Sachin sat down to sketch the incubating bird and the result was certainly wonderful. Prasad and I went to investigate an old nest of a Crested Hawk-Eagle and discovered sadly that it was currently unoccupied.

A group of us decided to trek up the valley towards the plateau and see what it offered us. On the way we put up a Yellowfronted Pied Woodpecker and, a little further on, a Pygmy Woodpecker. Considerably elated with this bonanza, we next flushed a pair of Blackheaded Cuckoo-Shrikes. Then a clear musical call was heard but the songster remained elusive. Moorty was convinced that if we waited long enough, we would spot the bird. Before we could do so, delving into memories of trips to Narsapur, we identified the songster as a Goldfronted Chloropsis. While waiting for the Chloropsis to appear, we heard what seemed to be the call of a Lorikeet. This bird has been seen in Anantgiri before and, although we waited, we could not see the bird. Aasheesh later said that he had heard it as well.

Our group came out of the bush on the top of a plateau and the view certainly made the climb worthwhile. We flushed a couple of Yelloweyed Babblers that fled chattering. As I was telling about the possibility of leopards and bears being found in these hills a rather unpleasant grunting became audible. This caused a certain amount of consternation amongst the nervous members, the more so because the animal refused to show itself but continued to grunt and growl! Eventually, we decided to let Kullu lead the way and so scare away anything that might be lurking in ambush and so proceeded further. A beautiful grass meadow on the hill prompted K.C. and Prasad to start planning a weekend camping trip to these hills—to pitch a tent and watch the dancing flames of a camp-fire. Others greeted the plan with much enthusiasm!

Moorty, Vinay and I spotted a babbler that caused a great deal of confusion. Striated Babbler or Jungle? Later we realized that the former is not found so far south. Assembling at 1pm near the temple, growling stomachs prompted the group to repair to the rest house and unpack lunch boxes. A Goldenbacked Woodpecker's strident call seemed to voice approval of the move. Some of the members went in search of the bird to the trees whence it had called. It surprised us by appearing inside the rest house compound. The search party returned with cries of "Offside, foul, unsporting", *etc*!



Whitespotted Fantail Flycatcher *Rhipidura albicollis*

We started back at 4pm. As we did so it began to rain. As though the weather gods wanted to begin where we'd finished. All in all it was a wonderful trip with some interesting sightings and quite a lot of nesting activity. Comparing field notes we found that we had notched up 47 species.

***[Editors' Note**: Wild animals, however 'harmless' they seem, are best left alone. They could be carriers of rabies, among other diseases. Further notes on some of the species mentioned above are in *Birding Notes* on p. 7.]

VULTURE ALERT—Update

Aasheesh Pittie

The decline in vultures across the country is causing grave concern among conservationists in India. The response to a note circulated by Dr Asad R Rahmani, the Director of Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS), in November 1998 (see *Pitta* # 92, December 1998), was sobering enough to warrant a special meeting on 8.viii.1999 at BNHS, Mumbai. This was to try and hammer out a solution to the problem of plummeting vulture populations. I participated in this meeting along with people from all parts of the country.

In his introductory remarks Dr Rahmani told us that scientists of the BNHS were aware of a gradual decline in vulture populations in India over the past decade, but the sudden slide in their numbers over the past 2-3 years has catalyzed the need for urgent action. A study by Dr Vibhu Prakash (principal scientist, BNHS) at the famed Keoladeo Ghana (Bharatpur) Bird Sanctuary showed a 95% decline in population of vultures in the past decade. The number of nests and nesting success has also declined. The most alarming observation was that vultures of *Gyps* spp. appear sick and perch atop trees with their heads hanging limp for 30-32 days after which they die. Dr Satheesan of WWF-India felt that the major causes for decline of vultures were paucity of food in some areas, lack of safety while feeding, direct or indirect poisoning of carcasses, habitat loss, *etc*. Dr P.K. Malik [veterinarian, Wildlife Institute of India (WII)] suggested a multidisciplinary approach to tackle the problem and volunteered to hold a workshop on the correct techniques of collecting samples for analysis. Dr Sálim Javed (Dept of Wildlife Science, Aligarh Muslim University) and I observed that vulture populations have declined in our respective areas. Dr R.B. Singh (SDSM College, Palgarh) did not agree that vulture populations had crashed as there was a lack of evidence and suggested that proper surveys should be made before making such claims! Other participants gave various suggestions. It also transpired that there was a drop in recent years in the number of vulture feathers (bird-hit victims) received by the BNHS from civil and defense airfields for identification.

Based on his study at Bharatpur, and treating that area as representative of a major part of the landscape of north India, Dr Prakash enumerated a variety of causes for the decline in vultures. These were, inadequate food supply; inadequate nesting and perching sites; effect of chemical pesticides and insecticides; poisoning of carcasses; outbreak of disease; changes in genetic diversity; and, calcium deficiency. Of these, the following three were prioritized.

1) Outbreak of disease; 2) Chemical contamination; 3)Poisoning.

It was generally felt that there was no shortage of food supply in north India and therefore a lack of calcium in the diet of vultures was also not responsible for declining numbers. Participants felt that vultures are adaptive creatures with very large home ranges. Inadequate nesting sites could not be the primary reason for the decline of vultures. It was also felt that since there was no conclusive evidence indicative of inbreeding depression, changes in genetic diversity of a population was a remote cause. The following action plan was developed.

- Sick vultures would be trapped in Bharatpur and kept under observation of veterinarians from WII, *etc*.
- Conduct all necessary pathological and toxicological examinations immediately.
- Organize a training workshop on sample collection within four weeks at Bharatpur.
- Develop and design a questionnaire for gathering vulture data to be sent to various people throughout the country including protected area managers.
- Immediately start regular ground surveys at specific locations from where participants had come *ie*. Bharatpur, Nasik, Aligarh, Hyderabad, Dehradun, Palgarh, Coimbatore and Mumbai. Surveys would also be conducted at various airports with which BNHS had been associated in the past.
- Captive breeding facilities as a method for *ex-situ* conservation and to study the development of disease.
- Creation of an Indian Vulture Study Group.
- Publication of vulture updates through various media.
- Creation of awareness by the publication and distribution of local language leaflets on importance of vultures.

All participants felt that for any action to be effective, coordination between institutions working in the field of conservation throughout India was necessary.

"Two persons including a High Court advocate were nabbed by the Rayadurgam police in Rangareddi District for hunting peacocks and a wild duck on Saturday. The dead birds and a rifle were seized from their possession. Police said the accused...a businessman...and...the advocate, had gone out for hunting in the Nanakramguda hillocks where they killed the birds. People residing in the nearby villages alerted the police who rushed to the area and arrested the duo. A case was registered against them under the Wildlife Protection Act, 1974 and under Indian Arms Act for not having a valid license for the rifle. The accuseds were produced in court on Saturday and were remanded to police custody. They will be again produced in court on Monday, the Rayadurgam police said". [*Deccan Chronicle* 16.viii.1999]

Calendar of Events

September-December 1999: 1st Sunday of every month: BSAP's Gardens & Semi-wilderness Area Surveys. The project continues for another 6 months. Fortnightly surveys reduced to monthly. Further details from 'KC' (3751652)/H.Taher (3352607)

BNHS Programmes (Complete details from BNHS 022-2821811. Camps for members of BNHS, nature-walks & talks open to all):

23.viii-2.ix BNHS First batch of Bird Banding Training Programme for 1999-2000 season[1]. Other camps at:

26.xi-5.xii: Assam (site to be selected).

22.xii-31.xii: Point Calimere (TN).

10.ii-5.iii.2000: Andamans.

***31.iii-9.iv.2000:** Point Calimere (TN).

2-3.x.1999: World Birdwatch'99.

1st week October 1999: Wildlife week.

12.11.1999: Sálim Ali Bird Count—organized by BNHS.

23.9.2000—1.10.2000, Nepal: International Symposium on Galliformes. Info., from Prof. A.H. Musavi, Secretary, W.P.A. India, 6 Kabeer Colony, Anoop Shahar Road, Aligarh 202002.

[1] Four camps have been added to those reported in *Pitta* # 100 p. 7.

* 20.iii – 29.iii . 2000.

LETTER FROM AN INSECT-HUNTING ORNITHOLOGIST—29

"Biological classification . . . . . is based on the fact that evolution produces groups of more nearly or more distantly related species. Evolution thus sets severe limits to the number of possible classifications. Nevertheless, even when there is complete consensus about the phylogeny of a group of organisms, it is nearly always possible to translate this knowledge into a number of alternate classifications. The reason for is that three operations of the taxonomist cannot be carried out without an element of arbitrariness: (1) the delimitation of groups which we formally recognize as taxa (their 'size'), (2) the rank in the hierarchy which we assign to a given taxon (e.g. tribe, subfamily, family), and (3) the position in the sequence of taxa. The necessity of having to translate a multidimensional phylogenetic tree into a linear sequence permits many alternate arrangements . . . . . A taxonomist will be the more successful in his classification the more clearly he realizes that it is the major function of a classification to be useful. A classification is a communication system, and the best one is that which combines greatest information content with greatest ease of information retrieval . . . . ." [E. Mayr, 1969. Principles of Systematic Zoology, pp. 97-98]

"I am convinced, with Blackwelder and Boyden, that the introduction of evolutionary concepts into systematics has produced great confusion. The systematist may not be anti-evolutionary, but in practice he is non-evolutionary.

"Therefore, in opposition to Mayr's assertion (1949, ['Systematics and the origin of Species'— KG] p. 23) that 90 percent of modern taxonomic work consists in the study of variation, I venture to say that 100 percent of systematic research consists in the investigation of the stable elements in nature. The principle [*sic*! — KG] task of the systematist is not 'that of detecting evolution at work' (Huxley), but is the study of the work of evolution."

[T. Borgmeier, 1957, "Basic Questions of Systematics", *Systematic Zoology*, 6: 67]

". . . . . I would contend that any empirical conflict between the so-called 'phylogenetic' and 'phenetic' schools of taxonomy involves little more than the adequacy of statistical procedures. There may be deeper conflict on a metaphysical level, but, in the present context, that is irrelevant. Both parties would now be well advised to return to the job of improving classifications by collecting new data while unstudied, or poorly known, taxa are still with us." [D.H. Colless, 1967, "The Phylogenetic Fallacy", *Systematic Zoology*, 16: 295]

The Artamidae, or what are called the Wood Swallows and Swallow-Shrikes, are Oriental and Australian in distribution, with 10 described species in a single genus (*Artamus* Vieillot). As the name indicates, these could be the 'link' between the Swallows and the Shrikes? Two species are resident in our area, the one on the mainland and the island of Ceylon being closely associated with palm trees (especially the Palmyra), and the other is found in the Andaman Islands; no endemics occur in our region.

The Starlings and what we call Mynas belong to the family Sturnidae, which has 108 species (in 24 genera) distributed in the Palaearctic (except the extreme Arctic Circle), Afrotropical and Oriental regions, extending east to New Guinea and other Pacific Ocean islands further east, as well as the NE. corner of the Australian continent. They avoid the deserts of Sahara, Arabia and central Asia, but have been introduced into SE. Australia, New Zealand, North America, Hawaii, the Comoros, Christmas and a few other islands, including some in the West Indies. The Indian region is home or winter feeding ground to 21 species (2 are stragglers) belonging to 6 genera, of which one, *Saroglossa*, is autochthonous here. We have 12 Starlings (*Saroglossa* Hodgson, *Aplonis* Gould, *Sturnus* Linnaeus) and 9 Mynas (*Acridotheres* Vieillot, *Ampeliceps* Blyth, *Gracula* Linnaeus), of which the following 8 are endemic in our sub-continent — Spotted-winged Starling (*Saroglosssa spiloptera*), Blyth's, White-headed, Ceylon and Brahminy Starlings (*Sturnus blythii*, *S. erythropygius*, *S. senex*, *S. pagodarum*), the Bank Myna (*Acridotheres ginginianus*), and the Sahyadris and Black-faced Hill Mynas (*Gracula indica*, *G. ptilogenys*). Our familiar Indian Myna (not 'Common' please!) has been introduced into many countries like Australia, New Zealand and South Africa, besides also into many Atlantic, Pacific and Indian Ocean islands (Seychelles, Mauritius) as well. Like its generic name indicates, it is partial to grasshoppers and their introductions were made principally to help bring down pest populations of these insects in cultivated tracts there. This, however, is one glaring example of early unscientific introductions — this bird having itself become a 'pest' in some of these places now!

We come now to the Corvidae, a family restricted to crow-like birds, including magpies, jays, tree pies, nutcrackers, choughs, etc., once considered worthy of a place at the pinnacle of avian evolution, because of their high 'intelligence' — but this being an anthropomorphically 'weighted' character, we soon realized! The family is placed even 'lower' in the Passeriformes by Sibley & Monroe (than did Wetmore or Ripley), but it has been expanded by them to include the orioles, drongos, swallow-shrikes, ioras, monarch, paradise and fantail flycatchers, cuckoo-shrikes, minivets, flycatcher-shrike, wood shrikes, and even the mangrove whistler, in our region! This, by any stretch of imagination, seems nothing but excessive 'lumping', even if the DNA data suggests it. The restrictive, more homogenous Corvidae, that we recognize through Ripley & Sálim Ali, have 112 species (26 genera) distributed all over the world, except in the extreme arctic, southern South America, New Zealand (introduced here), and the interior of Australia. In our area 28 species (6 genera) occur, being predominantly resident, but, if the Sibley—Monroe 'tapestry' is to be accepted, the number of our 'Corvidae' would increase to 71 species in 23 genera! Remaining committed to the Ripley sequence for practical expediency however, we have 3 Jays (*Garrulus* Brisson, *Podoces* Fischer), 5 Magpies (*Cissa* Boie, *Urocissa* Cabanis, *Pica* Brisson), 5 Tree Pies (*Dendrocitta* Gould), 3 Choughs (*Pseudopodoces* Zarudny & Loudon, *Pyrrhocorax* Tunstall), 2 Nutcrackers (*Nucifraga* Brisson), and 6 Crows, a wintering Rook, a Jackdaw and 2 Ravens (*Corvus* Linnaeus). Six of these are endemic to our region — the Black-throated Jay (*Garrulus lanceolatus*), Ceylon Blue Magpie (*Urocissa ornata*), White-bellied Tree Pie (*Dendrocitta leucogastra*), Andamans Tree Pie (*D. bayleyi*), White-rumped Nutcracker (*Nucifraga multipunctata*), and, believe it or not, perhaps our Jungle Crow (now correctly *Corvus culminatus*) as well! What we knew as *Corvus macrorhynchos* (= *C. levaillantii*) is now the Large-billed Crow, which is found only from Bengal (?) eastwards into Burma, Tenasserim and the Andaman Islands, through Indo-China to the Malay Archipelago. The 'Jungle Crow' of the high Himalayas is actually *Corvus intermedius*, the Himalayan Crow, which is apparently distinct from our real Jungle Crow (*C. culminatus*) that occurs south of the Himalayas and Bengal, from the Indo-Gangetic Plains, the Central Highlands and the Indian Peninsula to Ceylon. The 'Jungle Crow' of the eastern Himalaya could also turn out to be possibly distinct (*C. tibetosinensis*?). See Map in the INDIAN HANDBOOK (5: 253; 1971) and especially the extremely detailed analytical treatment of our "Jungle Crows" by Whistler & Kinnear (1930, *J.B.N.H.S.*, 34: 390-391 and

1932, *J.B.N.H.S.*, 35: 510-513, 2 figs), which was taxonomically misinterpreted by Bharat Bhushan (1992, *Hornbill* # 62, pp. 8-12) and other recent workers. These are the pressing "Species Vs Subspecies" questions we still need to answer, with scholarship and the aid of a complete database (of collections and literature, besides fresh field observations as well), in our sub-continent, before we can really understand the real status of many of the 'polytypic' species, that were recognized by Stuart Baker through Dillon Ripley, as including many "subspecies".

The Bombycillidae are the Waxwings and Silky Flycatchers, with the Grey Hypocolius, seemingly related, placed within as a subfamily, the Hypocoliinae. Sibley & Monroe rank the latter as a distinct family, and as more related to the Bulbuls, and also the 'Prinias' (Wren-Warblers) and 'Cisticolas' (Fantail Warblers), both of the latter they recognize as a full family, the Cisticolidae! The Waxwings are Holarctic, resident in the subarctic and temperate areas of the Northern Hemisphere, and wintering in the more southerly portions. In our region, 7 species in 5 genera are known, of which one (*Bombycilla* Vieillot), *B. garrulus* [*sic*! — KG] has been recorded as a straggler from Quetta and along the western Himalaya to Nepal. The Grey Hypocolius (*Hypocolius Bonaparte*) is monotypic and recognized as a subfamily or family, as I have explained above. It is known from Baluchistan, Sindh, Cutch and the coast of northern Maharashtra (Colaba). The binomen "*Bombycilla garrulus*" is one example of several such unconfirmed 'gender checks' of our bird nomenclature still needed. If the genus name is feminine (in gender), the species name should be corrected to "*garrula*", like the name of the other species is spelt "*japonica*" (and not *japonicus*). A thorough name-by-name gender check is required to be done for all of the 1,413 valid binomens of our bird species that I recognize in my UPDATED CHECKLIST (1998).

As mentioned above, our Flycatcher-Shrike, Wood Shrikes, Cuckoo-Shrikes, and Minivets were transferred to their Corvidae tribe Oriolini by Sibley & Monroe. But, I prefer here to retain them in the family Campephagidae, which is an Old World tropics bird group found in Africa south of the Sahara, in Madagascar island, and in the Oriental and Australian Regions (except in New Zealand), and also extending to Japan, Korea and the adjacent mainland of China and Russia. Some 72 world species are known, in 9 genera, of which 17 (in 5 genera) are resident in our region. There is 1 Flycatcher-Shrike (*Hemipus* Hodgson), 3 Wood Shrikes (*Tephrodornis* Swainson), 5 Cuckoo-Shrikes (*Coracina* Vieillot, *Lalage* Boie), and 8 Minivets (*Pericrocotus* Boie) of which one is a winter straggler here. Our 3 endemic species are the Malabar Wood Shrike (*Tephrodornis sylvicola*), the Black-headed Cuckoo-Shrike (*Coracina melanoptera*), and Jerdon's Minivet (*Pericrocotus erythropygius*).

The next family, Irenidae (Ioras, Chloropses, Fairy Bluebird), is very significant for us Orientals because it is the sole bird group that is restricted to the the classical Oriental Region of Alfred Russel Wallace, who is well known for his biogeographical divisions of the earth into 6 fairly distinctive 'Regions'—the Palaearctic, Afrotropical (as his "Ethiopian"), Oriental, Australian, Nearctic and Neotropical. However, the Hemiprocnidae (Crested Swifts) are also peculiarly Oriental if, like we entomologists believe (see J.L. Gressitt, 1956, *Systematic Zoology* 5: 11-32, 47 *et seq.*), almost all of the Pacific Ocean islands (which some biologists treat as a 7th "Oceanian" Region) have a predominantly Oriental character now. Sibley & Monroe, however, place the Ioras (4 Oriental species) as a subfamily Aegithininae of their expanded Corvidae! This change is debatable and, of the 2 species of *Aegithina* Vieillot that occur in our region, Marshall's Iora (*A. nigrolutea*) is endemic here. One of the 2 world species of Fairy Bluebirds (*Irena* Horsfield) occurs in our area, as do 3 of the 8 Chloropsis species (*Chloropsis* Jardine & Selby), none of which are peculiar to our sub-continent. Sibley & Monroe curiously consider their Irenidae (minus Ioras) as the most 'primitive' family of the Suborder Passeres! I have always felt, however, that these beautiful birds were very suggestive of the Bulbuls (Pycnonotidae), as arboreal, frugivorous and insectivorous species, with similar behaviour and voices, some being very good mimics of other birds' calls. These are some of the bizarre sequential (phylogenetic) changes in Sibley & Monroe that make me very wary of adopting this much-hyped DNA-based re-classification proposed by these authors. Caution and specialist affirmation (through more research and work experience) is needed, fellow bird watchers!

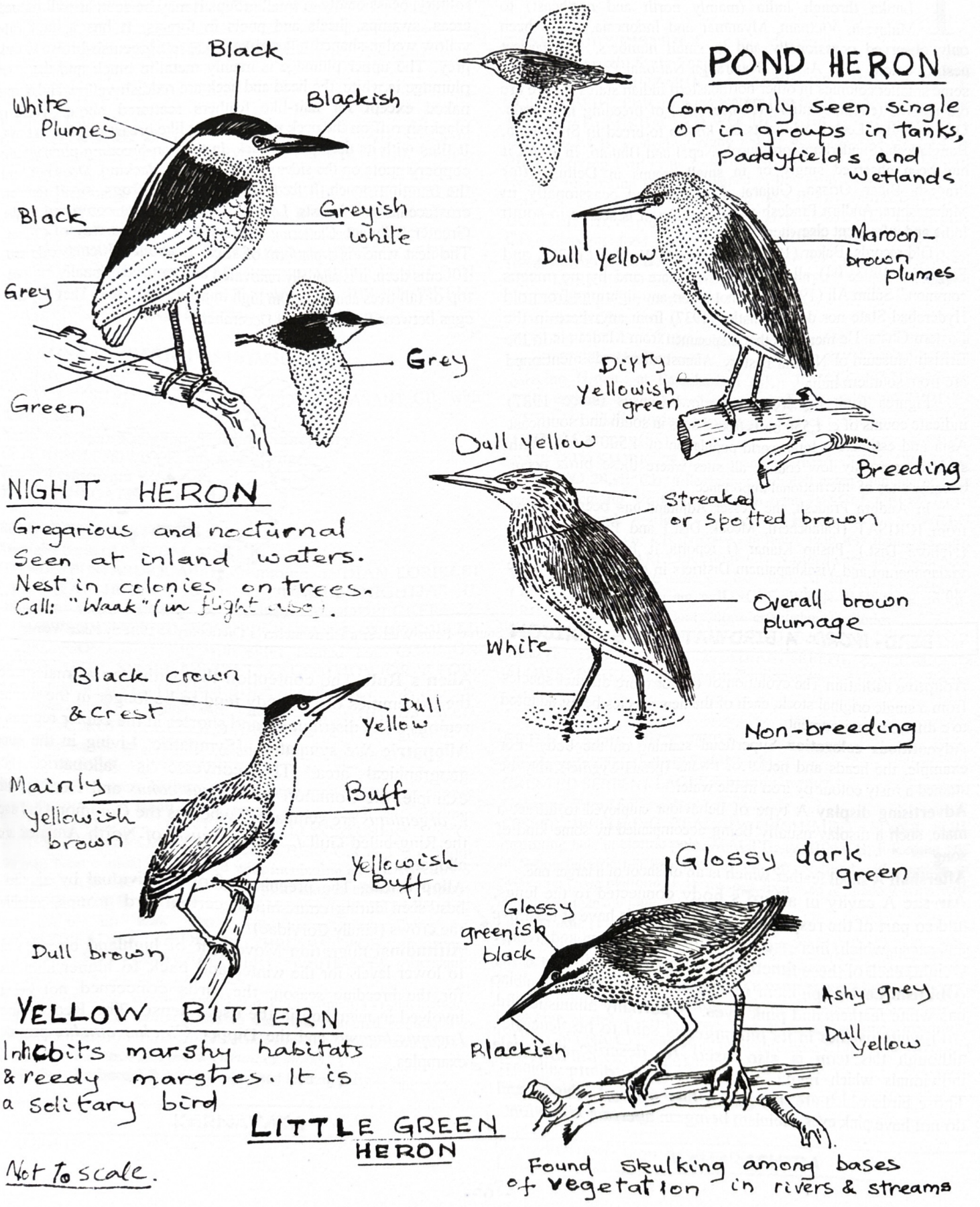
We now come to our familiar Bulbuls belonging to one of the 'special' 10 or so families that are strictly Afrotropical and Oriental in distribution only. Except for large parts of the western Sahara, Bulbuls occur continuously from Africa through Arabia, southern Iraq and Iran, all over S. & SE. Asia to Wallace's Line. A few species extend into Japan or the Moluccas, from the Ryukyu Islands or the Philippines. Some 118 living species (in 14 genera) have been described and named. In our region, 23 of these occur, as residents, separated in 7 genera (*Spizixos* Blyth, *Pycnonotus* Boie, *Xanthixus* Oates, *Alophoixus* Oates, *Iole* Blyth, *Hypsipetes* Vigors, *Hemixos* Blyth). The following 10 species are endemic in our area — the Grey-headed, Ruby-throated, Black-capped Yellow, and White-cheeked Bulbuls (*Pycnonotus priocephalus*, *P. gularis*, *P. melanicterus*, *P. leucogenys*), the Yellow-throated, Yellow-eared, and White-browed Bulbuls (*Xanthixus xantholaemus*, *X. penicillatus*, *X. luteolus*), the Yellow-browed Bulbul (*Iole indica*), and the Nicobars and Sykes' Grey Bulbuls (*Hypsipetes nicobariensis*, *H. ganeesa*). I have revived the genus *Xanthixus* Oates (1889, OLD FAUNA 1: 274) which had been erected for *Pycnonotus flavescens* Blyth (Blyth's Bulbul) which occurs from north-east India through the Indo-Chinese Peninsula and in northern Borneo. The 3 endemics from Peninsular India and Ceylon ("Dravidia") named above are very similar (and 'primitive'?), unlike the other 10 species of Pycnonotus known from our region. Inskipp et al. list 33 species of *Pycnonotus* from their 'Oriental Bird Club Region' (1996, ANNOTATED CHECKLIST, pp. 157-159), and Howard & Moore (1984, WORLD CHECKLIST, pp. 365-369) cite a further 16 *Pycnonotus* species occurring only in Africa and Madagascar. These 50 species, placed in *Pycnonotus*, are apparently not all homogenous, and I think some 'splitting', and recognition of more 'real' genera, would be a better treatment of these 50 species. More research will tell, I suppose, and also whether *Xanthixus* Oates, with the above 4 Indian species included by me, needs to be revived and recognized.

[Errata: Letter # 27—Corrigenda: Line 7 from bottom of text para 3 on page 3 should read "our 779 Passeriformes species (184 endemic),", line 5 from bottom of same should read "and 1,413 Species (296 endemic),". In Table on p. 4, Alaudidae figures should now read: 9 (0) 23 (7) and in TOTALS, species figures should now read: 779 Species (184 endemic).
Letter # 28—Addenda: Line 3 from bottom of text para 2 on page 3 should read "the following 6 are endemics in our area— Horsfield's, Madras and Red-winged Bush Larks (*Mirafra assamica, M. affinis, M. erythroptera*)...."**]**

— **Dr Kumar Ghorpadé**, 1861 Bethel Street, Bangalore 560 043 & e-mail: varanus.kg@mailcity.com

FIELD CRAFT *By* Siraj Taher & Sachin Jatare [2]

HERONS & BITTERNS: Medium sized, squat, short-necked birds inhabiting reeds in inland waterbodies and swamps. Feed on fish, shrimps, crabs and aquatic insects. Bitterns are usually loners while herons may be found in small groups. A heron's call is raucous and a bittern's loud and booming.



SPOTLIGHT: Lesser Adjutant (Stork) *Leptoptilos javanicus* By Siraj A. Taher

This column focuses on birds that are listed in the Red Data Book of BirdLife International as threatened / highly threatened species. Readers are requested to send information about these birds to the Society.

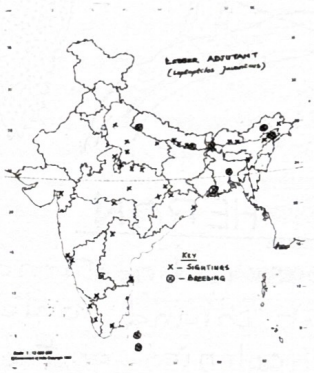
Though the Lesser Adjutant seems fairly well spread from Sri Lanka through India (mainly north and northeast) to Malaysia, Vietnam, Myanmar and Indonesia, it has been only observed ocassionally and in small numbers. The largest nesting colony is in Assam (Kaziranga National Park). There are some smaller colonies in other northeastern Indian states. There are old records (circumstantial evidence only) of breeding in Kerala. Outside India, Lesser Adjutants are known to breed in Sri Lanka, Bangladesh (Sunderbans province), Nepal and Bhutan. In India it has been observed singly or in small groups in Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Orissa, Gujarat, Rajasthan and ocassionally in Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka. It is scarce in south India and infrequent elsewhere.

Old records, Baker (1935), Davidson & Wendon (1878), and Ferguson (1903, 04) all found it "very rare and by no means common." Sálim Ali (1934) does not report any sightings from old Hyderabad State nor does Whistler (1937) from anywhere in the Eastern Ghats. He mentions that a specimen from Madras is in the British Museum of Natural History. Almost all records mentioned are from southern India.

Figures from the Asian Waterfowl Census (since 1987) indicate counts of *c.* 1,550 birds from 5 sites in south and southeast Asia and estimate a total world population of 4,500 birds. With such dangerously low counts, all sites where these birds occur become sites of international importance.

In Andhra Pradesh, the Lesser Adjutant has been reported from ICRISAT (Patancheru, Medak Dist.) and Pulicat Lagoon (Nellore Dist.). Pushp Kumar () reports it from Srikakulam, vizianagaram and Visakhapatnam Districts in the northeast of the state.

This stork is a fairly large, shy and retiring bird. Usually solitary, ocassionally in small groups it may be seen at well watered areas, swamps, jheels and pools in forests. It has a huge dirty yellow wedge-shaped bill and legs that are greenish-brown to dark grey. The upper plumage is mainly metallic black and the lower plumage is white. the head and neck are reddish-yellow and almost naked except for hair-like feathers scattered about. There is blackish ruff on the neck which appear like breast patches in flight. It flies with its neck pulled back. In the non-breeding plumage, the coppery spots on the sides of the wings are lacking. Does not have the hanging pouch. It feeds mainly on fish, frogs, small reptiles, crustaceans and locusts. Less of a scavenger as compared to the Greater Adjutant. Clattering of mandibles is main way of calling. The nest which is a platform of stick, is about 150cms wide and 100cms deep, it is annually renovated and re-used. Usually built on top of tall trees about 10-20m high in a forested area. They lay 2-3 eggs between September and December.



BIRD-*WORD*: A BIRDWATCHER'S LEXICON Source: Peter Weaver's Birdwatcher's Dictionary © 1981 by Peter Weaver.

Adaptive radiation The evolution of two or more distinct species from a single original stock, each of the new species being adapted to a different environment.

Adventitious coloration Superficial staining on the body. For example, the heads and necks of swans (genus *Cygnus*) may be stained a rusty colour by iron in the water.

Advertising display A type of behaviour employed to attract a mate, such a display usually being accompanied by some kind of song.

Aftershaft A small feather which is an offshoot of a larger one.

Air sac A cavity in a bird's body connected to the lungs, and so part of the respiratory system. Birds have at least five air sacs, which increase breathing efficiency and reduce weight, each of these functions being an aid to flying.

Albinism Lack of pigment on the body, so that a full albino has white feathers and pink eyes. A partially albinistic bird, with white patches in its plumage, is said to be 'leucistic', although this term is also used to describe very pale individuals which might also be called 'dilute albinos'. Those birds which are normally white are not albinos, and do not have pink eyes, albinism being an aberrant condition.

Allen's Rule The contention that within an animal species the extremities of the body tend to be longer in the warmer regions of its distribution and shorter in the cooler regions.

Allopatric *See* sympatric. [Sympatric: Living in the same geographical area. The converse is 'allopatric'. For example, the Common Gull *Larus canus* and Herring Gull *L. argentatus* are sympatric, whereas the Common Gull and the Ring-billed Gull *L. delawarensis* of North America are allopatric.]

Allopreening The preening of one individual by another, best seen during courtship in certain bird groups, notably the crows (family Corvidae).

Altitudinal migration Movement of highland birds down to lower levels for the winter and back to higher altitudes for the breeding season, the birds concerned not being involved in migration in the usual sense. The Red Grouse *Lagopus lagopus* and the Dipper *Cinclus cinclus* provide examples.

BIRDING NOTES Compiled by Aasheesh Pittie

This column publishes birding notes in brief telegraphic form, from **Andhra Pradesh, Goa, Haryana, Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra, Punjab, Rajasthan & Tamil Nadu** on interesting and significant sightings and behaviour like breeding, feeding, migration, nesting, *etc*. Notes on flowering and fruiting trees and their relationship with birds are also welcome. English names and classification follow, S.D. Ripley's *A Synopsis of the Birds of India and Pakistan* (1982, 2nd ed.) and scientific nomenclature, T. Inskipp, N. Lindsey & W. Duckworth's *An Annotated Checklist of the Birds of the Oriental Region* (1996). Unless specified, all observations are for 1999. Abbreviations, Contributors, Notes, Regional Referees, *etc*., are at the end. For selection of breeding criteria 'Probable, Possible, Confirmed', see *Pitta* # 82, February 1998, p. 4.

ANDHRA PRADESH

MEDAK DISTRICT

ICRISAT Campus (SQ)

OPENBILL STORK 23.vi: 14; BROWN CRAKE 25.vi: CB, pair with 1 yng; REDWATTLED LAPWING 24.vi: CB, N with 4 eggs. 8.vii: ad., with 1 yng bird; PIED CRESTED CUCKOO 17.VII: CB, fledgeling in large grey babbler nest; SMALL GREENBILLED MALKOHA 24.vii: PRB, carrying worm in beak; LARGE GREY BABBLER 17.vii: CB, N with a pied crested cuckoo fledgeling & 'sisterhood' in attendance; STREAKED FANTAIL WARBLER 21.vii: CB, N with 5 eggs; PLAIN WREN-WARBLER 17.vii: CB, N with 3 yng & 2 eggs. 27.vii: N with 4 eggs; JUNGLE WREN-WARBLER 24.vii: PRB, N under const.

NALGONDA DISTRICT 25.vii (MSU)

Dindi Reservoir

GREAT CRESTED GREBE[1] ? 5; CROW-PHEASANT CB, with lizard in bill.

Nagarjunasagar-Srisailam Wildlife Sanctuary

GREY JUNGLEFOWL CB, ad., with 2 yng.

Umamaheshwaram

YELLOWTHROATED BULBUL 1.

RANGAREDDI DISTRICT

Anantgiri 8.viii (AP, JVDM, MSK)

COMMON BUSTARD-QUAIL H drumming; INDIAN LORIKEET ? H; GREAT HORNED OWL 1; JUNGLE NIGHTJAR H; CRESTED TREE SWIFT 3; PIGMY WOODPECKER* 1; YELLOWFRONTED PIED WOODPECKER* 1 F; WHITEBELLIED DRONGO* CB, 1 yng with short fanned tail; COMMON WOODSHRIKE*; SMALL MINIVET* C; COMMON IORA* POB, M in br., plm; REDVENTED BULBUL* Abundant. CB, 1 N *c*. 3' up in Lantana bush, 3 eggs. Ad., incubating; WHITEBROWED BULBUL* C; RUFOUSBELLIED BABBLER* C, CB, 1 globular N of dry grass leaves, in ground vegetation, 4 open-eyed yng fed by ad; TICKELL'S BLUE FLYCATCHER CB, 1 N *c*. 7' up inside man-made unused structure. Skimpy pad of damp rootlets, *etc*., on narrow ledge in corner of small 'open room. 4 yng both ad., feeding; WHITEBROWED FANTAIL FLYCATCHER* C; WHITESPOTTED FANTAIL FLYCATCHER* C, CB, 1 N *c*. 9' up dry twig. Neat conical cup topped with incubating ad; FRANKLIN'S WREN-WARBLER* POB, M in br., plm, song & territorial display; ASHY PRINIA CB, ad., carrying food in bill; GREY TIT* PRB, 1 N hole *c*. 6' up teak. Ad., with const., mat., flying in; ORANGEHEADED GROUND THRUSH*[2] POB, in song; THICKBILLED FLOWERPECKER*; WHITE-EYE* Abundant; RED MUNIA PRB, carrying N-mat.

[1] Earlier reported from Kondakarla & Thatipudi (Visakhapatnam Dist.). Author's id notes point to this bird, but prudence requires further confirmation. Also quite outside general wintering season.

[2] Whitethroated race *Zoothera citrina cyanotus*.

* Member of arboreal & terrestrial mixed feeding party.

KARNATAKA

BANGALORE DISTRICT

Badamanavarthi State Forest 13.vi.

WHITE-EYED BUZZARD 1 (LS); SHORT-TOED EAGLE 1; HOUSE SWIFT PRB, carrying feather into N (JNP). 6.vi: freq., same N (AmP); BLACKBACKED WOODPECKER 1 M (UR); BLACK DRONGO CB, Fledgeling being fed by ad. (SS); HOUSE CROW PRB, carrying twig in its toes (MBK); SMALL MINIVET CB, M feeding incubating F on cup-shaped N that sways due to wind. N *c*. 4m up on *Acacia leucophloea* (SS,JNP); WHITEBROWED BULBUL CB, carrying food (L.S); WHITETHROATED BABBLER CB, carrying food (SS); WHITEHEADED BABBLER CB, 1 fledgeling in flock (JNP); INDIAN ROBIN CB, carrying food (SS); PURPLERUMPED SUNBIRD PRB, F carrying cotton from Giant Milkweed *Calatropsis gigantea* (JNP).

Bangalore City

PARIAH KITE 31.i: CB, on N in Peepal tree *Ficus religiosa c*. 6m up at Chikka Hoskote tank (JNP); INDIAN MYNA 07.vii: PRB carrying N-mat., at Banashankari (SK); JUNGLE MYNA 22.vii: PRB, entering crevice in city apartment (SS, S.Karthikeyan); WHITE-EYE 12.vi: POB, singing in Jayanagar 3rd Block (MBK).

GKVK Campus (SS)

PAINTED STORK 22.vii: 4 flying overhead; PIED CRESTED CUCKOO 28.vii: CB, 4 fledgelings with dull green plumage & pale gape. 1 begging. No foster parents in sight; JUNGLE CROW 6.vii: CB, 3 N with nestlings, 1 fallen on ground; INDIAN WREN WARBLER 28.vii: CB, N const., in maize field less than *c*. 3' up; ASHY WREN-WARBLER 28.vii: CB, N with 4 eggs. Dome-shaped, with lateral entrance hole *c*. 1.6' up next to path amidst dry *Chromalena* (Eupatorium); JUNGLE WREN-WARBLER 6.vii: PRB, disp., & calling from treetops, establishing territories.

Mixed party of 4 WHITEHEADED BABBLER, 2 IORA, 2 REDVENTED BULBUL, 2 INDIAN TREEPIE & TICKELL'S FLOWERPECKER mobbing 1m Rat Snake *Ptyas mucosus c*. 2m up a shrub.

SHIMOGA DISTRICT (JNP)

Chipleguda (Thirthahalli Taluk) 14.v

CRESTED SERPENT EAGLE 1 soaring overhead.

Gajanur Dam 13.v

LESSER WHISTLING TEAL 19; BRAHMINY MYNA POB, inspecting hole in electric pole; MAGPIE-ROBIN CB, F feeding yng in N-box (electric junction box) *c*. 5m up. N lined with rootlets or twigs in a loose platform. F threw out fecal sac & made 2 trips with food in less than a minute at 18.35hrs.

Pattalamane (Thirthahalli Taluk) 14.v

BLOSSOMHEADED PARAKEET abundant. A pair allopreening (*see* p. 6); BLUEWINGED PARAKEET abundant; LORIKEET CB, ad., feeding fledgeling; RUFOUS WOODPECKER a pair; RACKET-TAILED DRONGO 2 gleaning bark of *Ailanthus malabaricus* & flycatching. Later dueting, one had a racket missing—moulting? INDIAN MYNA CB, carrying food into hole *c*.12m up in *Syzigium* sp.; MAGPIE-ROBIN POB, M singing;

Shimoga Town 13.v

INDIAN MYNA POB, frequenting hole in old building; JUNGLE MYNA CB, carrying food.

MAHARASHTRA

AHMEDNAGAR DISTRICT (SMK)

Kapurwadi Reservoir

GREY HERON 10.v: 2. Rare; WHITENECKED STORK 24.vii: 2; WHITE IBIS 10.v: 2; GLOSSY IBIS 10.v: CB, 60+ ad., & yng feeding in shallow water; SPOONBILL 24.vii: 9; PINTAIL 10.v: 40+; SPOTBILL 10.v: 4. 24.vii: *c.* 200; COMMON POCHARD 10.v: 50+; PURPLE MOORHEN 10.v: 20 feeding in marsh; PHEASANT-TAILED JACANA 10.v: POB, pair. M in br+ plm; COMMON SANDPIPER 24.vii: 3.

PUNJAB

FIROZEPUR DISTRICT

Harike Bird Sanctuary (HSS)

7.iii: CHESTNUT BITTERN 1; BLACK BITTERN 2; PEREGRINE FALCON 1; COMMON ROSEFINCH 1.

8.iii: SPARROW-HAWK 2; MERLIN 1; SMALL INDIAN PRATINCOLE 24; GREAT BLACKHEADED GULL 1; LONGEARED OWL 4; WHITETAILED STONECHAT 2; BLACKTHROATED THRUSH 4; SLATYBLUE FLYCATCHER 1; LONGTAILED GRASS BIRD 6; PENDULINE TIT 6; HIMALAYAN TREE CREEPER 1; ROCK BUNTING 1.

9.iii: ALEXANDRINE PARAKEET 4; INDIAN EAGLE-OWL 3; PIGMY WOODPECKER 1; SAND LARK 26; SCARLET MINIVET 1; RUFOUSTAILED SHRIKE 2; REDBACKED SHRIKE[1]; MOUSTACHED WARBLER 1; STRIATED MARSH WARBLER 10; SPANISH SPARROW 21; SIND SPARROW 6.

TAMIL NADU

NILGIRIS DISTRICT (AM)

Mudumalai Wildlife Sanctuary 12.ii:

GREAT BLACK WOODPECKER nesting on a *Grewelia tilifolia* *c.*4-5 metres from ground. Both Male and female were observed feeding the chicks inside; Could even hear the young ones craving for food; The pair used to take turns to feed the young ones.

ABBREVIATIONS: Ab-abundant; ad-adult/s; br-breeding; C-common/ly; CB-confirmed breeding; const-construction/ing; *c.*-approximately; disp-display/ing; F-female; flt-flight; fly-family; freq-frequent/ly; hrd-heard; id-identify/ied; imm-immature; inc-include/ing; Is-Island; juv-juvenile; LM-local migrant; M-male; mat-material; N-nest/ing/s; POB-possible breeding; PRB-probable breeding; plm-plumage; RF-Reserve Forest; Resp-respectively; Tlk-Taluk; vil-village; WL-wildlife; yng-young.

CONTRIBUTORS: A. Madhusudan (AM); A. Pittie (AP); A. Poddar (AmP); Harkirat S. Sangha (HSS); J.N. Prasad (JNP); J.V.D. Moorty (JVDM); L. Shyamal (LS); M.B. Krishna (MBK); M.S. Kulkarni (MSK); M. Shafaat Ulla (MSU); S. Karthikeyan (SK); Sudhakar M. Kurhade (SMK); S. Quader (SQ); S. Subramanya (SS); U. Ramaiah (UR).

REGIONAL REFEREES: Andhra Pradesh: A. Pittie; Goa: H. Lainer; Haryana: H.S. Sangha; Karnataka: J.N. Prasad; Kerala: P.O. Nameer; Maharashtra: N. Jamdar; Punjab: H.S. Sangha; Rajasthan: H.S. Sangha; Tamil Nadu: V. Santharam.

CONTACT CALLS

"I have been a member of BSAP for about a year and always look forward to receiving and reading the *Pitta*. I find it to be informative and interesting to some extent but there is scope for improvement in its contents. As a beginner I would like to see tips and guidance for identifying birds in the field. It would also be nice to know something of their behaviour, nesting habits, migration, *etc*. Maybe a bird can be chosen for each edition which can be kept as a record. The serialized scientific article that accompanies the *Pitta* is impossible to understand and beyond normal comprehension. Maybe such articles are more suited for scientific journals and not Newsletters which should carry happenings, field notes, programmes and information. The above are not only my views but also similar opinions expressed by many of my colleagues and I do hope you would take it in the right spirit. Please let me know if I can be of any help."

—M. Shafaat Ulla, Hyderabad

"Congratulations for producing the 100th issue of *Pitta* and kudos for keeping *Pitta* alive. It is a feeling a great elation (I still feel I am a part of BSAP) and sorrow (I contribute nothing to it) for me. How often (at least once a month) I yearn to join you folks on those joyful Sunday bird watching trips! I cannot add anything more to your exhaustive list of feathered kind. But I can surely take pride in seeing my good friends still not saying "adieu" to bird watching. Bravo chaps, *Pitta*, the "newsletter" and the "bird" both will see many more birding friends under your baton!"

—B.C. Choudhury, Dehradun

LITERARY WRENDITIONS

THE EAGLE

Fragment

Lord Alfred Tennyson

He clasps the crag with crookëd hands;
Close to the sun in lonely lands,
Ringed with the azure world, he stands.
The wrinkled sea beneath him crawls;
He watches from his mountain walls,
And like a thunderbolt he falls.

For Private Circulation Only

For more information, write to: Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh, PO Box 45, Banjara Hills PO, Hyderabad 500034, India.
Editors: Aasheesh Pittie (3350683) & Siraj A Taher (3352607) **E-mail**: AASHEESH@HD1.VSNL.NET.IN
Membership (Rs): Admission=20; Ordinary=100, Student=25 per annum; Life=1,000. *Outstation cheques not accepted.*
Illustration: page 1 by Sachin Jaltare.

PITTA

6·X 1999

Bulletin of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh No. 102 : October 1999

PROGRAMME

Indexed / 14.2.2001

FIELD OUTING: 10-x-1999: Narsapur Reserved Forest, Medak District: Members are requested to reach the destination by 7am. Vehicles will start from Shanbhag Hotel, Panjagutta at 6am. Those requiring transport may reserve a place. Contact Aasheesh / Siraj (3350683 / 3352607). This will be a full day trip and members should carry a light lunch and water. Hourly buses, starting at 5.30am to Medak *via* Narsapur, leave Imliban Bus Stand and Jubilee Bus Stand, Secunderabad. Narsapur R.F. is the closest patch of forest to Hyderabad and harbors many species that are not found within the city. These include Goldfronted Chloropsis, Whitethroated Ground Thrush, Grey Tit and a fascinating variety of small passerines.

INDOOR MEETING: 18-x-1999, 6 p.m.: Talk and slide show by Aasheesh Pittie on bird-banding in Tirupati region. Vidyaranya High School, Opp., Secretariat, Saifabad, Hyderabad 500004.

NOTES & NEWS

Happenings at the Society
Field Trip to Shamirpet Lake—12.ix.1999

Suhel Quader

It was a wonderful day to be outdoors. A blanket of clouds shielded us from the sting of the sun's rays as we gathered at the tourist resort at Shamirpet Lake. Little *Cassia auriculata* bushes were in glorious yellow bloom, brightening up the sunless morning. Sunbirds and red-and-black-striped blister beetles buzzed around in the morning air. At the lake waterbirds were few and far between, but as we set off we spotted a solitary, aristocratic Large Egret mincing its way along the shallows. Further on, a lonely Openbill Stork contemplated its toes with a resigned air. Overhead, an immature Brahminy Kite glided in the company of some Pariah Kites. But for its rounded tail and white underwing patches, it looked deceptively like its commoner cousins. And then came a magnificent adult Brahminy, wafting along over the water, tackling the strong wind with feather-twitching ease. A Pied Kingfisher seemed equally unbothered by the breeze, hovering and diving after fish, spotting its prey despite the ruffled water, and correcting for refraction as it went into free-fall. Other birds had a harder time of it: River Terns struggled to fly upwind, hugging the surface, where the air is stillest, and Little Egrets and Pond Herons flapped and flapped their wings, but despite their efforts got nowhere.

A solitary Common Sandpiper bobbed its way along the shore, perhaps hungrily refueling after a long migration from its breeding grounds in the Himalayas. It kept a wary eye on our approaching group, while ignoring the cormorants as they dove for fish in the shallows or perched on small rocks and spread their wings to dry. Over land, we were up to our ears in displaying Ashycrowned Finch-larks. The males seemed everywhere, repeatedly fluttering skyward, then going into a roller-coaster dive, whistling a thin, sad note on the descent. One pair of males rose, fell and sang several times in close unision before tumbling groundwards to perch on a small stone. Engrossed in finch-lark behaviour, we moved along so slowly that a placid herd of buffaloes overtook us with ease. Bringing up its rear were several cattle egrets, whose unhurried air was punctuated every now and then by a frantic scurry after an unfortunate grasshopper flushed by the bovines' hooves.

As we walked along the shore of the lake we looked out for birds from the Deer Park, across the fence. Three species of wren-warbler (Ashy, Franklin's and Jungle) sang and displayed in the bushes. Trios of Small Green Bee-Eaters sallied out for flying insects from their perches on the fence. Whiteheaded Babblers tittered squeakily in the shrubs, and the distinctive raucous brays of a sisterhood of Large Grey Babblers drifted to us from a distant grove of trees. A watchful Pied Crested Cuckoo was spotted, perhaps awaiting her chance to slip an egg into a babbler nest. Consistent with a nation-wide trend, we saw no vultures on the trip, not even the pair of Scavenger Vultures that have nested faithfully on a tall rock in the Deer Park for many successive years. Readers who spot any species of vulture anywhere in India would do well to report this to our own 'Birding Notes'; the situation is getting very worrisome indeed.

We continued our way around the park, led by the enthusiasm and seemingly inexhaustible energy of the children in our group. A Glory Lily pointed its red-and-yellow tiger's claws heavenward, entirely worthy of the name *Gloriosa superba*. Some juvenile male Bayas practiced their weaving skills, building crude nests among the flowering *Ipomea* and wheezing out a shaky song. A party of Small Minivets gleaned insects off the leaves of a neem tree, moving so quickly from twig to twig that that it was impossible to follow them through our binoculars. The highpoint of the day came towards the end of the walk, with the discovery of a Tailorbird nest in a low bush. It was not yet complete, and several members watched the owner fly back and forth with silky fibre, delicately stitching the edges of two leaves together to make a marvelously neat and compact purse-like structure. And on this industrious note ended an altogether delightful Sunday morning's birding.

Blewitt's Owlet *Heteroglaux blewitti* discovered in Andhra Pradesh!

Mr K.S.R. Krishna Raju has 'discovered' Blewitt's Owlets *Heteroglaux blewitti* in the Eastern Ghats, near Araku Valley (Visakhapatnam District) on the Orissa-Andhra Pradesh border. On 18th April 1999 he confiscated damaged specimens of two birds from tribal boys who had earlier *eaten* another similar bird! This is the second 'rediscovery' of the species in this century. Readers will

recall that another population had been discovered in Shahada, Maharashtra (*Pitta* # 81, January 1998) in December of 1997.

Donation of slides

The Society has received a set of wonderful slides of grassland birds from our Life Member, Mr Bishwarup Raha. We thank him for his generosity.

Electric utility penalized for causing death of birds

A federal judge...ordered an electric utility to pay $100,000 in penalties after 17 golden eagles and other protected birds were electrocuted on power lines in Colorado, in a case authorities said was the first of its kind. US district Judge Lewis Babcock assessed the penalties against Moon Lake Electric Associatioin in a case in which the government contended that the birds' deaths could have been prevented if the utility had installed inexpensive protective devices. Twelve golden eagles, four ferruginous hawks and a great horned owl were electrocuted on power lines in a remote area of western Colorado near the town of Rangely between 1996 and last year. At least 21 other birds of prey wre injured. The arid area is mostly treeless, "making Moon Lake's power poles preferred locations for perching, roosting and hunting by birds of prey," the judge said in an earlier ruling in the case. Moon Lake is a rural electric cooperative. The association pleaded guilty last April to six counts of causing the deaths of birds protected by the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act and by the Migratory Bird Treaty Act—Reuters [*The Economic Times* 14.viii.1999]

Calendar of Events

September-December 1999: 1st Sunday of every month: BSAP's Gardens & Semi-wilderness Area Surveys. The project continues for another 6 months. Fortnightly surveys reduced to monthly. Further details from 'KC' (3751652)/H.Taher (3352607)

BNHS Programmes (Complete details from BNHS 022-2821811. Camps for members of BNHS, nature-walks & talks open to all):

4-8.x: Exhibition at BNHS on "Wildlife on Stamps."

* Annual Nature Camps for 1999-2000:

South India: Rangannathittu, Kabini River, Nagarhole, Top Slip, Parambikulam & Mukurti NP. Non-refundable registration of Rs500/- on 4.ix.1999 (*Late news, but try your luck!*). 2 16-day batches of 23 each. **1.xii-16.xii:** 1st batch. **18.xii-2.i.2000:** 2nd batch.

North India: Kishanpur Wildlife Sanctuary & Dudhwa National Park. Non-refundable registration of Rs500/- on 13.xi.1999. 2 6-day batches of 23 each. **20-25.ii:** 1st batch. **27.ii-4.iii:** 2nd batch.

* BNHS Bird Banding Training Programme for 1999-2000 season: **8.x-17.x:** Point Calimere (TN). **20.x-29.x:** Parambikulam (Kerala). **15.xi-24.xi:** Kabartal, (Bihar). **26.xi-5.xii:** Assam (site to be selected). **22.xii-31.xii:** Point Calimere (TN). **10.ii-5.iii.2000:** Andamans. **20.iii-29.iii.2000:** Point Calimere (TN). **31.iii-9.iv.2000:** Tirupati (AP). **2-3.x.1999:** World Birdwatch'99. **1st week October 1999:** Wildlife week.

12.11.1999: Sálim Ali Bird Count—organized by BNHS.

23.9.2000—1.10.2000, Nepal: International Symposium on Galliformes. Info., from Prof. A.H. Musavi, Secretary, W.P.A. India, 6 Kabeer Colony, Anoop Shahar Road, Aligarh 202002.

LETTER FROM AN INSECT-HUNTING ORNITHOLOGIST—30

"The theory of evolution has evolved by stages, in an environment which has itself evolved. Before Darwin, ideas about evolution were usually random, fragmentary, uncoordinated, sometimes unrealistic, and unconvincing. Darwin put together observations and ideas into a coordinated theory which was complete (at the visible level), realistic, and therefore convincing. After Darwin, naturalists, Mendelian geneticists, mathematicians, and molecular biologists have successively elaborated and illuminated the theory; their contributions form a multi-level 'stepped whole', within which research continues fruitfully at all levels. The product of this evolutionary process is the present 'synthetic theory' of evolution. In the future, fundamentally new discoveries are most likely to be made at submolecular levels, but in the meantime we seem to be entering a new, healthy stage of more-even synthesis and return to reality in the study of evolution.

" 'What is truth? Said jesting Pilate; and would not stay for an answer' (Francis Bacon). And the answer does not come quickly. Truth, like beauty, is in the eye or the mind of the beholder. In scientists' minds truth is what scientists observe in the 'real world', but there are limits to it. And while scientific observations can be verified, explanations cannot be, but can only be tested and 'falsified', or not falsified, endlessly. This is the hypothetico-deductive process referred to in Chapter 3. Scientific explanations therefore evolve toward final truth but never reach it. But scientific explanations can become true in the everyday meaning of the word, as I think the theory of evolution has.

"Propaganda is a weapon of politics in science as well as in other human activities. It may be used in good faith, as I think promathematical propaganda and counterpropaganda are (Chapter 3), or it many [*sic*! - KG] be used 'for the purpose of helping or injuring an institution or a cause, or a person' (again from Webster's Collegiate Dictionary). It is sometimes difficult to distinguish between legitimate publicity of a scientific finding and exaggerated or distorted (propagandist) claims, and between fair criticism and suppression of ideas, especially since criticism and 'falsification' of ideas are an essential part of science."

[P.J. Darlington, jr, 1980, "*Evolution for Naturalists: the simple principles and complex reality*", pp. 15, 232-233, 249]

Of all the almost 50 taxa (meaning groups) of bird Orders in the non-Passeriformes, and Families in the Passeriformes, that I have named in the tables in my earlier Letters # 22 & 27 (February & July 1999) in *Pitta*, the Muscicapidae comprise the overwhelmingly numerically dominant family of this Class of animals. I recognize 396 species (101 endemic, = 25 %) and 90 genera (6 endemic) in the Indian region (minus Burma) that make up the 7 Subfamilies treated by Ripley (NEW SYNOPSIS) whose classificatory arrangement I will continue to use in this my taxonomic analysis, and update, of the Indian Avifauna. There are over 1,500 world species in this family, grouped in a little over 250 genera. Sibley & Monroe made major re-alignments within the Muscicapidae (see table in my Letter # 28 in *Pitta* of August 1999), predicated on their DNA-based molecular biology viewpoint, but I prefer to ignore these until a more comprehensive "synthetic theory" of bird evolution (*vide supra*) is agreed upon by truly scholarly systematic ornithologists, in future. The 6 endemic genera of Muscicapidae (*s.lat.*, = in the broad sense) in our region are *Sphenocichla* Godwin-Austen & Walden, *Dumetia* Blyth, *Myzornis* Blyth, *Laticilla* Blyth, *Chaetornis* G.R. Gray, and *Saxicoloides* Lesson. The last genus mentioned is monotypic (includes a single species) and its only member is our familiar Indian Robin (*Saxicoloides fulicata*), described by Linnaeus in 1776, and peculiar to our sub-continent, having evolved here.

I will now deal with each of the 7 Subfamilies here, one by one. The first is the Timaliinae, or Babblers, which are extremely well represented and diverse in our region. It has some 257 species (in 49 genera) distributed throughout the Old World tropics, from Africa and Madagascar through the Oriental Region to New Guinea, Australia and Tasmania. There is a single species, the Wren-Tit (*Chamaea fasciata*) which is the sole New World representative of Timaliinae, found only along the western coast of North America, from Oregon to California. The Indian region has a plethora of all kinds of Babblers (including the well-known "seven sisters" or the *saat bhai* in native tongue), and I recognize 140 species in 32 genera to which the first 3 above mentioned endemics belong. We have 29 variable species uniformly called Babblers (*Pellorneum* Swainson, *Malacocincla* Blyth, *Stachyris* Hodgson, *Dumetia* Blyth, *Rhopocichla* Blyth, *Timalia* Horsfield, *Chrysomma* Blyth, *Turdoides* Cretzschmar), 10 Scimitar Babblers (*Pomatorhinus* Horsfield, *Xiphirhynchus* Blyth), 11 Wren-Babblers (*Rimator* Blyth, *Napothera* G.R. Gray, *Pnoepyga* Hodgson, *Spelaeornis* David & Oustalet), 13 Tit-Babblers (*Macronous* Jardine & Selby, *Panurus* Koch, *Alcippe* Blyth), 6 Shrike-Babblers (*Pteruthius* Swainson, *Gampsorhynchus* Blyth), 2 Wren-Creepers (*Sphenocichla* David & Oustalet), 12 Parrotbills (*Conostoma* Hodgson, *Paradoxornis* Gould), 2 Babaxes (*Babax* David), 33 Laughing Thrushes (*Garrulax* Lesson, *Liocichla* Swinhoe), 2 Mesias (*Leiothrix* Swainson), 1 Myzornis (*Myzornis* Blyth), 1 Cutia (*Cutia* Hodgson), 3 Barwings (*Actinodura* Gould), 3 Minlas (*Minla* Hodgson), 7 Yuhinas (*Yuhina* Hodgson), and 5 Sibias (*Heterophasia* Blyth). More than a third of the species are endemic to our region, all of the following 51! — Brown-capped and Marsh Babblers (*Pellorneum fuscocapillum, P. palustre*), Horsfield's Scimitar Babbler (*Pomatorhinus horsfieldii*), Rufous-throated, Ripley's and Moore's Wren-Babblers (*Spelaeornis caudatus, S. badeigularis, S. longicaudatus*), Hume's and Wedge-billed Wren-Creepers (*Sphenocichla humei, S. roberti*), Red-billed and Godwin-Austen's Babblers (*Stachyris pyrrhops, S. oglei*), White-throated and Rufous-bellied Babblers (*Dumetia albogularis, D. hyperythra*), Black-headed and Black-fronted Babblers (*Rhopocichla atriceps, R. nigrifrons*), Sindh Grass Babbler (*Chrysomma scindicum*), Nepalese, Hume's, Blyth's and Oates' Parrotbills (*Paradoxornis nipalensis, P. humii, P. poliotis, P. oatesi*), Striated, Slender-billed, Large Grey, Grey-fronted Rufous, Jungle, Ceylon Rufous, White-headed and Spiny Babblers (*Turdoides earlei, T. longirostris, T. malcolmi, T. subrufus, T. striatus, T. rufescens, T. affinis, T. nipalensis*), Giant Babax (*Babax waddelli*), Ashy-headed, Striated, Chestnut-backed, Delessert's, Variegated, Tibetan, Rufous-necked, Nilgiris, Jerdon's, Streaked, Assamese, Brown-capped, Henri's, Red-headed, Oates' and Chestnut-throated Laughing Thrushes (*Garrulax cinereifrons, G. striatus, G. nuchalis, G. delesserti, G. variegatus, G. maximus, G. ruficollis, G. cachinnans, G. jerdoni, G. lineatus, G. virgatus, G. austeni, G. henrici, G. erythrocephalus, G. nigrimentum, G. chrysopterus*), Fire-tailed Myzornis (*Myzornis pyrrhoura*), Rusty-fronted, Hoary and Walden's Barwings (*Actinodura egertoni, A. nipalensis, A. waldeni*), Baker's Yuhina (*Yuhina bakeri*), Ludlow's Tit-Babbler (*Alcippe ludlowi*), and Cinnamon Sibia (*Heterophasia capistrata*). All our Timaliinae are strictly resident breeding birds, except the Bearded Tit-Babbler (*Panurus biarmicus*) which was once recorded near Attock (Pakistan) by Hugh Whistler.

We come next to another of my favourite bird groups, the 'true' flycatchers, belonging to the subfamily Muscicapinae (*s. str.*, = in the strict sense). I also seem to "belong" to this feathery fly-catching fraternity (!), having myself specialized as a Dipterist, who collects (samples), processes and studies the insect Order Diptera, or 2-winged flies, over a lakh (100,000) world species of which have now been described, but only some 7,000 from India so far, less than half of what probably still exist here. Some 254 species (in 30 genera) of 'true' flycatchers occur all over the Old World, from Africa to New Zealand and most Pacific Ocean islands, except in extreme desert areas and in the northernmost arctic circle. I recognize 36 Indian region flycatcher species, both resident and wintering, in 8 genera (*Rhinomyias* Sharpe, *Muscicapa* Brisson, *Ficedula* Brisson, *Niltava* Hodgson, *Cyornis* Blyth, *Eumyias* Cabanis, *Muscicapella* Bianchi, *Culicicapa* Swinhoe). The following 8 species are endemic here - Layard's and Rufous-tailed Flycatchers (*Muscicapa muttui, M. ruficauda*), Kashmiri and Black-and-Orange Flycatchers (*Ficedula subrubra, F. nigrorufa*), Jerdon's White-bellied and Brooks' Flycatchers (*Cyornis pallipes, C. poliogenys*), and the Dusky Blue and Nilgiris Flycatchers (*Eumyias sordida, E. albicaudata*).

There are also 4 species of what are called Fantail Flycatchers of the subfamily Rhipidurinae, in a single genus *Rhipidura* Vigors & Horsfield. These are treated as a tribe of the family Corvidae by Sibley & Monroe! They are an Indo-Australian group, with 40 world species (in 19 genera). The White-browed (*R. aureola*) and White-spotted (*R. albogularis*) Fantail Flycatchers are our endemics. In the subfamily Monarchinae, also placed in the Corvidae by Sibley & Monroe (!), we have 2 species, each in a genus (*Terpsiphone* Gloger, *Hypothymis* Boie). This group of Paradise and Monarch Flycatchers has 92 species (in 17 genera) all over Africa through the Orient to Australia (not New Zealand), except in desert regions. One species of *Pachycephala* Vigors occurs in our region and this belongs to the subfamily Pachycephalinae which is also placed by Sibley & Monroe in the Corvidae! These so-called "Whistlers" (10 genera, 47 species) are mainly Australian in distribution, but extend north-west, across the Malay Archipelago, to reach north-east India. All of the above in this paragraph are resident breeders in our region.

The Sylviinae, or Warblers, are again a very large and, I think, an actively evolving recent group of birds. The world fauna is 320 or more species, in 61 genera, found everywhere in the Old World except in the extreme Sahara-Arabian deserts. In the New World, the "Americas", their distribution there is peculiar, they occurring in the tropical latitudes, from Mexico to "Amazonia", besides also in southern Canada and northernmost U.S.A., extending down the Andes and the Pacific coast to Arizona and California. Sibley & Monroe (see table in *Pitta* # 100) treat them as a large family, including also the Acrocephalinae, Megalurinae, Garrulacinae and Timaliini! In our region I recognize 110 species (in 23 genera, *Laticilla* Blyth and *Chaetornis* G.R. Gray being our endemics) which include an assortment of 3 Ground Warblers (*Testa* Hodgson), 9 Bush Warblers (*Cettia* Bonaparte), 11 Grass Warblers (*Bradypterus* Swainson, *Laticilla* Blyth, *Graminicola* Jerdon, *Schoenicola* Blyth, *Chaetornis* G.R. Gray), 3 Fantail Warblers (*Cisticola* Kaup), 10 Wren-Warblers (*Prinia* Horsfield), 2 Hill Warblers (*Suya* Hodgson), 1 Scrub Warbler (*Scotocerca* Sundevall), 3 Tailors (*Orthotomus* Horsfield), 3 Grasshopper Warblers (*Locustella* Kaup), 1 Marsh Warbler (*Megalurus* Horsfield), 11 Reed and Sedge Warblers (*Acrocephalus* Naumann), 4 Tree and Tamarisk Warblers (*Hippolais* Baldenstein), 9 'true' Warblers and Whitethroats (*Sylvia* Scopoli), 27 Willow Warblers (*Phylloscopus* Boie), 10 Flycatcher-Warblers (*Seicercus* Swainson, Abroscopus Baker, *Tickelliae* Blyth), 2 Tit-Warblers (*Leptopoecile* Severtzov), and a Goldcrest (*Regulus* Cuvier). The following 18 of these being endemic here — Osmaston's Bush Warbler (*Cettia osmastoni*), Ceylonese Grass Warbler (*Bradypterus palliseri*), Rufous-crowned Fantail Warbler (*Cisticola erythrocephala*), Rufous-fronted, Hodgson's, Ashy, Jerdon's and Ticehurst's Wren-Warblers (*Prinia buchanani, P. cinereocapilla, P. socialis, P. sylvatica, P. sindiana*), Rufous-vented and Long-tailed Grass Warblers (*Laticilla burnesii, L. cinerascens*), Broad-tailed Grass Warbler (*Schoenicola platyura*), Bristled Grass Warbler (*Chaetornis striatus*), Mountain Chiffchaff, Tytler's, Hodgson's, Plain and Brooks' Willow Warblers (*Phylloscopus sindianus, P. tytleri, P. fuligiventer, P. humei, P. subviridis*), and the Grey-headed Flycatcher-Warbler (*Seicercus xanthoschistos*).

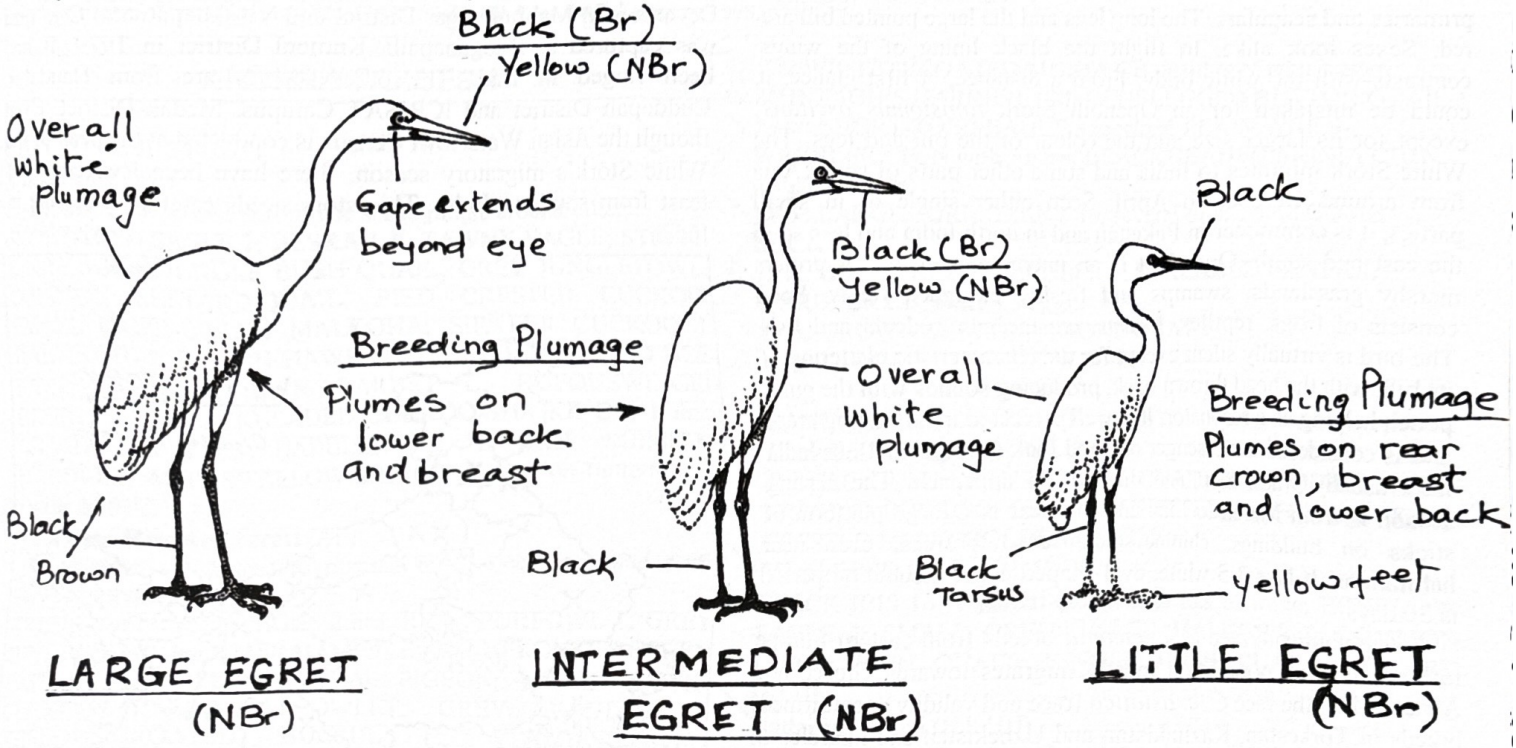
The last subfamily of the Muscicapidae is the Turdinae which some authors treat (like the Sylviidae) as a distinct family. These are the Thrushes with some 300+ species (in 41 genera) which are also actively evolving and radiating, and found world-wide, except in the extreme arctic circle and in the Australian deserts. The Indian region has 103 species (in 23 genera; *Saxicoloides* is the only endemic), which include 5 Shortwings (*Brachypteryx* Horsfield), 1 Scrub Robin (*Cercotrichas* Boie), 7 Rubythroats, Nightingale and their allies (*Luscinia* T.I.M. Forster), 4 Bush Robins (*Tarsiger* Hodgson), 2 Shamas and a Magpie-Robin (*Copsychus* Wagler), 4 kinds of Robins (*Irania* de Filippi, *Myiomela* G.R. Gray, *Cinclidium* Blyth, *Saxicoloides* Lesson), 12 Redstarts (*Phoenicurus* T.I.M. Forster, *Chaimarrornis* Hodgson, *Rhyacornis* Blanford, *Hodgsonius* Bonaparte), 1 Grandala (*Grandala* Hodgson), 5 Forktails (*Enicurus* Temminck), 2 Cochoas (*Cochoa* Hodgson), 11 different kinds of Chats (*Cercomela* Bonaparte, *Saxicola* Bechstein), 9 Wheatears (*Oenanthe* Vieillot), 4 Rock Thrushes (*Monticola* Boie), 3 Whistling Thrushes (*Myiophonus* Temminck), 13 Ground, Mountain and other Thrushes (*Zoothera* Vigors), and 19 Blackbirds and a 'Thrush', Fieldfare and Redwing (*Turdus* Linnaeus). The following 22 of these being our endemics - Rusty-bellied and Jerdon's Shortwings (*Brachypteryx hyperythra, B. major*), Blyth's Bush Robin (*Tarsiger hyperythrus*), Andamans Shama (*Copsychus albiventris*), Brown Rock Chat (*Cercomela fusca*), Stoliczka's Bush, Collared Bush and Blyth's Stone Chats (*Saxicola macrorhyncha, S. indica, S. leucura*), Pied Wheatear (*Oenanthe picata*), Indian Robin (*Saxicoloides fulicata*), Ceylonese and Malabari Whistling Thrushes (*Myophonus blighi, M. horsfieldii*), Pied Ground, White-throated Ground, Bay Islands Ground, Spotted-winged Ground, Western Ghats and Ceylonese Scaly Thrushes (*Zoothera wardii, Z. cyanotus, Z. albogularis, Z. spiloptera, Z. neilgherriensis, Z. imbricata*), and, finally, the Tickell's Thrush, and White-collared, Jerdon's and Ceylonese Blackbirds (*Turdus unicolor, T. albocinctus, T. simillimus, T. kinnisii*).

[Errata: Letter # 29 - Page 4: Line 6 from top of para 2, "Bonaparte" should be in roman and not in Italics. Line 6 from bottom of last para, the words "Pycnonotus" and "et al." should be in *italics*.**]**

— **Dr Kumar Ghorpadé**, 1861 Bethel Street, Bangalore 560 043 & e-mail: varanus.kg@mailcity.com

FIELD CRAFT *By* Siraj Taher & Sachin Jaltare [3]

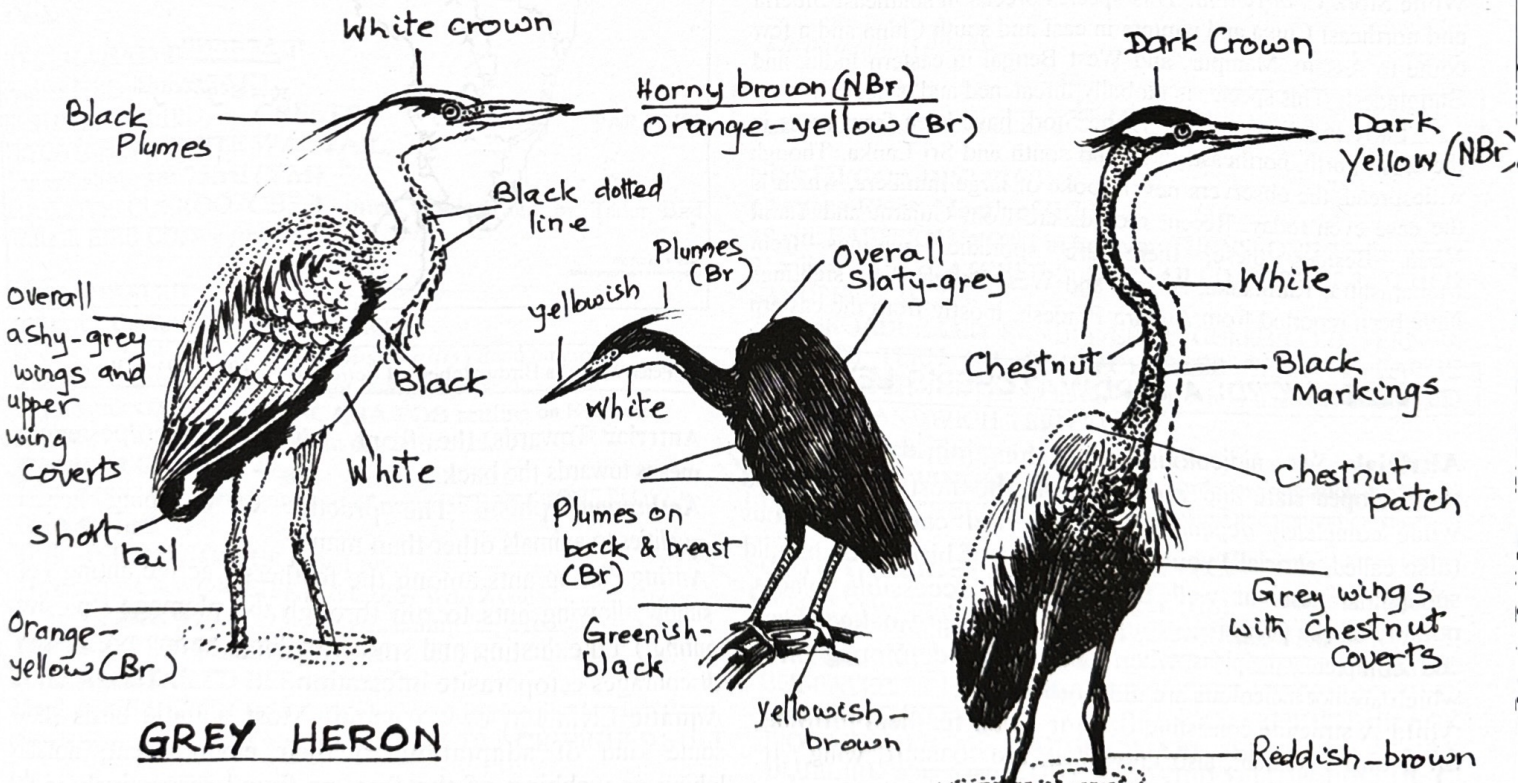
HERONS & EGRETS (Family Ardeidae) are longlegged birds with un-webbed toes. They have long flexible 'S'-shaped necks (that they pull back in flight), pointed bills, large and broad wings and short tails. They frequent marshes, fields and shallow waters lunging out with their sharp bill at any fish, frog or other small mammal. Grey and Purple Herons are the largest in the group. While some species are solitary, others are seen in small flocks. They all nest in small or large colonies called "Heronries".



LARGE EGRET (NBr)

INTERMEDIATE EGRET (NBr)

LITTLE EGRET (NBr)



GREY HERON

REEF HERON (Dark Phase)

(There is a white phase also)

Mostly found on the sea-shores.

PURPLE HERON

(In bright sunlight the bird appears purple on the upperparts and wings)

NBr = Non-breeding
Br = Breeding

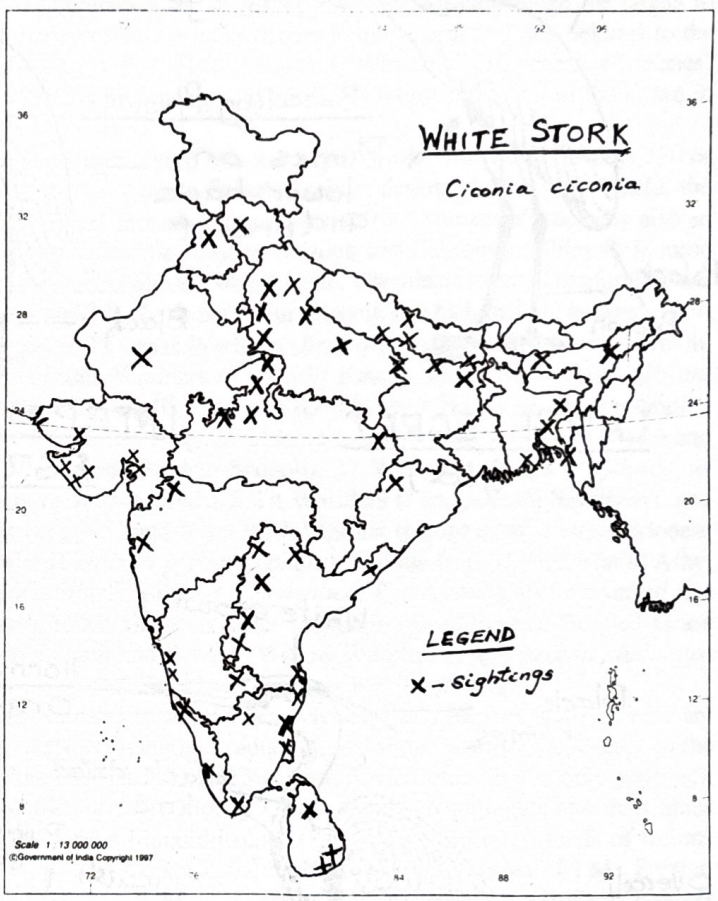
SPOTLIGHT: White Stork *Ciconia ciconia* By Siraj A. Taher

This column focuses on birds that are listed in the Red Data Book of BirdLife International as threatened / highly threatened species. Readers are requested to send information about these birds to the Society.

This stork is about 105cm tall, with a white body and black primaries and scapulars. The long legs and the large pointed bill are red. Sexes look alike. In flight the black lining of the wings contrasts with the white body. From a distance, at first glance, it could be mistaken for an Openbill Stork *Anastomus oscitans*, except for its larger size and the colour of the bill and legs. The White Stork migrates to India and some other parts of south Asia from around October to April. Seen either single or in small parties, it is commoner in Pakistan and in north India and less so in the east and south. Overall it is an uncommon visitor. It prefers marshy grasslands, swamps and freshly ploughed fields. Food consists of frogs, reptiles, locusts, crustaceans, rodents and fish. The bird is virtually silent except for the characteristic clattering of its bill, with the head thrown back, producing sounds with the gular pouch helping as a resonator. It is well protected in its nesting areas and is considered a messenger of good luck (and babies!), in India it is usually wary, alert and difficult to approach. The nesting season is from March to May and the nest is a large platform of sticks on buildings, chimneystacks or tall trees, even near habitations. It lays 3-5 white, oval-shaped eggs. Incubation period is 30 days.

The nominate race *C. c. ciconia* breeds from eastern Europe to Iran and this population mostly migrates towards Greece and Africa, while the race *C. c. asiatica* (race and validity unconfirmed) breeds in Turkestan, Kazhakistan and Uzbekistan and migrates to southern Asia. In east India, the range of the White Stork overlaps that of the similar (except for black bill and larger size) Oriental White Stork *C. boyciana*. This species breeds in southeast Siberia and northeast China and winters in east and south China and a few come to Assam, Manipur, and West Bengal in eastern India, and Bangladesh. This species is globally threatened and is declining.

Early Indian records of White Stork have been from areas in the west, north, northeast, east, and south and Sri Lanka. Though widespread, the observers never spoke of large numbers, which is the case even today. Recent records are from Gujarat and Tamil Nadu. Besides these, there are sporadic sightings from Maharashtra, Karnataka, Assam and West Bengal. Few sightings have been reported from Andhra Pradesh, mostly from the eastern part of the State. It was seen at Narsampet, Warangal District and Devarkonda, Mahbubnagar District and Visakhapatnam. One bird was captured at Banganapalli, Kurnool District in 1979. It had been ringed in Iran. The other reports are from Nandalur, Cuddapah District and ICRISAT Campus, Medak District. Even though the Asian Waterfowl Census is conducted at the peak of the White Stork's migratory season, there have been few reports at least from southern India. This stork needs careful monitoring in India.



BIRD-*WORD*: A BIRDWATCHER'S LEXICON Source: Peter Weaver's Birdwatcher's Dictionary © 1981 by Peter Weaver.

Altricial *See* nidicolous. [Hatching in a relatively undeveloped state and remaining in the nest for a period while completely dependent on parental care. Nidicolous (also called 'altricial') young are typical of birds which build substantial nests in well hidden or inaccessible places, notably all the passerine groups, and they are naked, blind and completely helpless when first hatched. Young birds which are not nidicolous are nidifugous.]

Alula A structure consisting of four small feathers growing on a bird's 'thumb', also known as the 'bastard wing'. It controls the airflow over the leading edge of the wing.

Antagonistic display A type of behaviour involving aggression, such a display being well seen in the defence of territory. It may also be called 'agonistic display'.

Anterior Towards the front. The converse, 'posterior', means towards the back.

Anthropomorphism The practice of ascribing human qualities to animals other than man.

Anting Placing ants among the feathers ('active anting') or simply allowing ants to run through the plumage ('passive anting'). Like dusting and smoke bathing, anting presumably discourages ectoparasite infestation.

Aquatic Living in or on water. Most aquatic birds show some kind of adaptation to their environment, notably lobing or webbing of the feet, as found respectively in the grebes (family Podicipedidae) and the gulls (family Laridae). In addition to the truly aquatic (swimming) birds, there are many riparian types.

BIRDING NOTES Compiled by Aasheesh Pittie

This column publishes birding notes in brief telegraphic form, from **Andhra Pradesh, Goa, Haryana, Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra, Punjab, Rajasthan & Tamil Nadu** on interesting and significant sightings and behaviour like breeding, feeding, migration, nesting, *etc*. Notes on flowering and fruiting trees and their relationship with birds are also welcome. English names and classification follow, S.D. Ripley's *A Synopsis of the Birds of India and Pakistan* (1982, 2nd ed.) and scientific nomenclature, T. Inskipp, N. Lindsey & W. Duckworth's *An Annotated Checklist of the Birds of the Oriental Region* (1996). Unless specified, all observations are for 1999. Abbreviations, Contributors, Notes, Regional Referees, *etc*., are at the end. For selection of breeding criteria 'Probable, Possible, Confirmed', see *Pitta* # 82, February 1998, p. 4.

ANDHRA PRADESH

CHITTOOR DISTRICT

Bhakarapet (AP)

22-26, 29-31.viii: Dense xerophytic scrub jungle around village.

SHORT-TOED EAGLE 2; BESRA 1 F; TAWNY EAGLE; STEPPE EAGLE 1 imm; JUNGLE BUSH QUAIL, GREY JUNGLEFOWL, COMMON BUSTARD-QUAIL, PIED CRESTED CUCKOO; SMALL GREENBILLED MALKOHA; SIRKEER CUCKOO 1; BARN OWL 2; BROWN HAWK-OWL hrd; BLUETAILED BEE-EATER; LARGE GREEN BARBET C; RUFOUSWINGED BUSHLARK[1]; BLACKHEADED CUCKOO-SHRIKE CB, 1 imm; SHAMA; SPOTTED BABBLER C; INDIAN SCIMITAR BABBLER; ASHY SWALLOW-SHRIKE preying on butterflies on marigold field.

Talakona Reserved Forest (AP)

26, 28-29.viii: Rich tract of riparian moist deciduous and semi-evergreen forest.

CRESTED SERPENT EAGLE 2 hrd; RED SPURFOWL 1; GREY JUNGLEFOWL hrd; EMERALD DOVE; GREYFRONTED GREEN PIGEON 10; GREEN IMPERIAL PIGEON; LARGE HAWK-CUCKOO 1; JUNGLE OWLET; GREY WAGTAIL 4; YELLOWTHROATED BULBUL C; YELLOWBROWED BULBUL C; SHAMA; BROWNBREASTED FLYCATCHER 2; SPOTTED BABBLER C; QUAKER BABBLER; BLACKHEADED ORIOLE.

HYDERABAD DISTRICT

Jubilee Hills 11.ix (SAK)

KESTREL; PIED CRESTED CUCKOO; PARADISE FLYCATCHER; WHITE WAGTAIL.

Vanasthalipuram 25.vii (YM)

PLAINTIVE CUCKOO CB, 1 imm., being fed by Tailor Bird; TAILOR BIRD CB, *see previous*.

MEDAK DISTRICT

ICRISAT Campus 28.vii-19.ix (SQ)

30.vii: CORMORANT sp. (*niger/fuscicollis*) dead on ground *c*. 1km from nearest water. Green-blue egg stuck to cloaca.

30.vii: BRONZEWINGED JACANA POB settling on N in water hyacinth; COUCAL with c. 40cm snake in beak; JUNGLE WREN WARBLER CB N with 4 eggs.

1.viii: COUCAL POB, flying out of nest; GREAT STONE PLOVER One individual.

11.viii: INDIAN ROLLER CB, 1 juv.

14.viii: BLACKWINGED KITE CB, N with 2 chicks.

22.viii: BLACKWINGED KITE ad., eating large rodent (body 8-10cm long); PURPLE MOORHEN CB, ad., with 1 chick.

24.viii: BLUETAILED BEE-EATER 4.

25.viii: REEF HERON 1 (in dark plumage) in rice paddies in a flock of cattle egrets; WOOD SANDPIPER c.30; BLACKWINGED STILT 1.

31.viii: WHITEBREASTED WATERHEN CB, N with 1 egg.

4.ix: REDHEADED MERLIN 1; ASHY WREN WARBLER CB, N with 2 chicks and 1 egg.

6.ix: WHITETHROATED MUNIA CB, N with 2 eggs.

9.ix WHITETHROATED MUNIA CB, another N with 4 eggs; MONTAGU'S HARRIER 1 M; BLUELEGGED BUTTON QUAIL 1

13.ix: SHORT-TOED EAGLE 3 together; PLAIN WREN-WARBLER CB, N with 5 eggs; BLACKHEADED MUNIA CB, N with 3-5 chicks.

14.ix: LARGE CORMORANT 46, several in br., plm; COMB DUCK 1.

15.ix: GREAT REED WARBLER 1; STREAKED FANTAIL WARBLER CB, N with 5 eggs.

16.ix: BROWN SHRIKE 1; STONE CHAT 1

19.ix: COMMON SWALLOW 30-40.

RANGAREDDI DISTRICT

Chevella-Mirzapur 14.viii (RM)

JUNGLE BUSH QUAIL; GREY QUAIL; RAIN QUAIL; PIED CRESTED CUCKOO; GREEN SANDPIPER; PEAFOWL; SYKES' CRESTED LARK; GOLDEN ORIOLE.

Mamidipalli 11.viii (JH, HtJ)

BLACK IBIS 16, 1 partial albino with lots of white; BONELLI'S EAGLE 2; SMALL GREENBILLED MALKOHA 1; COMMON QUAIL; RAIN QUAIL; JUNGLE BUSH QUAIL; BUSTARD QUAIL.

Nadergul 11.viii (HJ, HtJ)

OPENBILL STORK 15; INDIAN SANDGROUSE 32; COMMON QUAIL; RAIN QUAIL; JUNGLE BUSH QUAIL; BUSTARD QUAIL.

[1] *Mirafra affinis affinis*.

GOA

NORTH GOA DISTRICT

Chapora River, Mouth of (HL)

19.viii: EASTERN KNOT 1 in br., plm; TURNSTONE 2 in br., plm.

31.viii: OYSTERCATCHER 2; BARTAILED GODWIT 3; TEREK SANDPIPER 21.

7.ix: BROADBILLED SANDPIPER 2; GULLBILLED TERN 8; ROSEATE TERN 1ad; WHITECHEEKED TERN 40; LARGE CRESTED TERN 40 ad., (3 in br., plm), 9 juv; LESSER CRESTED TERN 46; SANDWICH TERN 31.

Seabird Watch, Anjuna

15.vi: BROWNWINGED TERN southward mass migration starts.

10.viii: WHITECHEEKED TERN southward mass migration starts.

SOUTH GOA DISTRICT

Cotigao Wildlife Sanctuary 8-12.vii (HL)

IMPERIAL PIGEON 10+; BLUEWINGED PARAKEET 5; WHITERUMPED SPINETAIL SWIFT 4; CHESTNUTHEADED BEE-EATER 1; MALABAR GREY HORNBILL C; CRIMSONTHROATED BARBET C; GREAT BLACK WOODPECKER 1; LARGE WOOD SHRIKE few; FAIRY BLUEBIRD abundant; RUBYTHROATED YELLOW BULBUL C; BLACKHEADED BABBLER 30+; WHITEBELLIED BLUE FLYCATCHER 1F; SHAMA 10+.

KARNATAKA

BANGALORE DISTRICT

Bannerghatta National Park

1.viii: JUNGLE BUSH QUAIL 2M, 1F; BLACK EAGLE; SHORT-TOED EAGLE; CRESTED HONEY BUZZARD; WHITETHROATED BABBLER CB, N in mid-game path, 4 eggs being incubated; SPOTTED BABBLER POB, hrd song; YELLOWEYED BABBLER CB, ad., removing fecal sac from N; REDRUMPED SWALLOW CB, N & juv., seen with ad; TAILOR BIRD CB, ad., feeding yng; PIED BUSHCHAT CB, 1 yng with pale gape; WHITE-EYE PRB, const., N (PKD, NJ, SK, JNP, TNR).

Bangalore City: Byrasandra (SS)

9.viii: LITTLE CORMORANT 35 flying overhead.

15.viii: HOUSE CROW CB, feeding a fallen Koel fledgling.

Bangalore City: Cubbon Park (JNP)

26.ix: SCAVENGER VULTURE 1 ad., 1 sub-ad., mobbed by 3 Jungle Crows.

Bangalore City: Jigani Tank (JNP)

25.vii: COOT CB, 2 ad., 8 yng; POND HERON many in br., plm; NIGHT HERON 1 imm; LITTLE BITTERN[2] CB, 1 juv; HOUSE CROW PRB, collecting & carrying away dry grass blades; STREAKED WEAVER BIRD CB, 3 N in *Typha angustata*. Ad., with N-matl & food seen; BAYA CB, 2 colonies of 18 & 7 N *c.* 3m up on Wild Date Palm *Phoenix sylvistris*

Bangalore: Jnanabharathi Campus (SR, JNP)

8.viii: SPOTTED MUNIA PRB ad., carrying grass blade into 2m tall Ixora bush; BAYA CB, 11 N under const., 3 complete. M disp., & calling.

Bangalore: Ring Road (JNP)

8.viii: INDIAN MYNA CB, carrying food.

Bangalore: Thomas Town / Cooke Town (AC, SC)

7-8.1999: LITTLE CORMORANT & NIGHT HERON CB, N on various Mango & Tamarind trees.

GKVK Campus (SS)

2.viii: JUNGLE CROW CB, feeding a fledgling; RED MUNIA 20+ feeding along the edge of a mud road on grass seeds washed out by previous night's torrential rain.

BIJAPUR DISTRICT

Mudhol (RBN)

5.vii: BAYA PRB, N seen.

7.vii: BLACK IBIS PRB, perched on N on Banyan tree.

[2] "Seen after 22 years."

ALWAR DISTRICT

Sariska Tiger Reserve 6.vi (HSS)

EURASIAN CUCKOO hrd; INDIAN PITTAhrd; BLACKHEADED CUCKOO-SHRIKE; PARADISE FLYCATCHER.

DAUSA DISTRICT

Kalakho (HSS)

19.iv: SPOTTED REDSHANK in br., plm; YELLOWHEADED WAGTAIL 1, in br., plm.

6.v: PAINTED STORK 40; SARUS CRANE 26, PRB, displaying, calling; BLACKWINGED STILT 6, CB, incubating.

17.v: LITTLE TERN 1.

JAIPUR DISTRICT

Hanuman Nagar (HSS)

5.v: BROWN ROCK CHAT CB, incubating.

21.vi: PIED CRESTED CUCKOO chased by Common Babbler.

Manoharpura 2.iv (HSS)

ROSY PASTOR 50.

Phulera 20.iv (HSS)

CURLEW 2 foraging on grassy area of dry lake.

Sambhar 20.iv (HSS)

WHITEBACKED VULTURE 4 roosting on Banyan tree.

ABBREVIATIONS: Ab-abundant; ad-adult/s; br-breeding; C-common/ly; CB-confirmed breeding; const-construction/ing; *c.*-approximately; disp-display/ing; F-female; flt-flight; fly-family; freq-frequent/ly; hrd-heard; id-identify/ied; imm-immature; inc-include/ing; Is-Island; juv-juvenile; LM-local migrant; M-male; mat-material; N-nest/ing/s; POB-possible breeding; PRB-probable breeding; plm-plumage; RF-Reserve Forest; Resp-respectively; Tlk-Taluk; vil-village; WL-wildlife; yng-young.

CONTRIBUTORS: Aasheesh Pittie (AP); Ashish Chandola (AC); Harkirat S. Sangha (HSS); Hatim Jafar (HtJ); Heinz Lainer (HL); Hyder Jafar (HJ); J.N. Prasad (JNP); Niren Jain (NJ); P.K. Dinesh (PKD); Rajeev Mathew (RM); Ravindra B. Naik (RBN); S. Ashok Kumar (SAK); S. Karthikeyan (SK); Shanti Chandola (SC); Sunil Ranade (SR); T.N. Ramamani (TRN); Y. Malini (YM);

ERRATA: *Pitta* # 98: 6 — Note-4 should read "first inland winter record for Rajasthan (HS)."

REGIONAL REFEREES: Andhra Pradesh: Aasheesh Pittie; Goa: Heinz Lainer; Haryana: Harkirat S. Sangha; Karnataka: J.N. Prasad; Kerala: P.O. Nameer; Maharashtra: Nitin Jamdar; Punjab: H.S. Sangha; Rajasthan: H.S. Sangha; Tamil Nadu: V. Santharam.

RAJASTHAN

LITERARY WRENDITIONS

"With its patient study by rocks and sandy capes, has it wrested the whole of her secret from Nature yet? It has looked out from its dull eye for so long, standing on one leg, and now what a rich experience it is! What says it of stagnant pools, and reeds, and damp night fogs? It would be worth while to look in the eye which has been open and seeing at such hours and in such solitudes. When I behold that dull yellowish green, I wonder if my own soul is not a bright, invisible green." —Thoreau [describing the small green bittern]

CONTACT CALLS

"Refer the heading 'Contact Calls' on page 8 of *Pitta* no. 100, 1999 where Mr Zafar Futehally remarked about S.H. Prater's talk during the "*BNHS Centenary in 1933.*" Prater's speech would have been at the BNHS Golden Jubilee which was celebrated in 1933 and not at the BNHS centenary in 1983." — **S Unnithan**, Mumbai

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For more information, write to: Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh, PO Box 45, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad 500034, India.
Editors: Aasheesh Pittie (3350683) & Siraj A Taher (3352607) **E-mail**: AASHEESH@HD1.VSNL.NET.IN
Membership (Rs): Admission=20; Ordinary=100, Student=25 per annum; Life=1,000. *Outstation cheques not accepted.*
Illustration: p. 2 Srikant Kolhe: Pastoral idyll at Shamirpet.

PITTA

13.XI 1999

Bulletin of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh No. 103 : November 1999

PROGRAMME

Indexed 13/2/2001

Mahbubnagar

FIELD OUTING: 28-xi-1999: Umamaheshwaram, Nalgonda District: 2 vehicles of the A.P. Forest Dept., will start at 7am sharp from Shanbhag Hotel, Panjagutta. Kindly book seats in advance (Aasheesh 3350683 / Siraj 3352607). This will be a full day trip. Bring food and water.

INDOOR MEETING: 15-xi-1999, 6 p.m.: Annual General Meeting. Vidyaranya High School, Opp., Secretariat, Saifabad, Hyderabad 500004.

NOTES & NEWS

Happenings at the Society: Field Trip to Narsapur—10.x.1999

M. Krishna Prasad

Sunday morning was cool and clear. Members of the BSAP gathered at Shanbagh Hotel for the field trip to Narsapur Reserved Forest in Medak district. Since it is a long drive, we left rather earlier than usual and reached at about 9.30 a.m.

After some discussion on whether we should have breakfast before or after birding, we eventually decided that breakfast could be safely put on hold for a couple of hours and so we all shouldered our bags, checked 'binox' and set off. Up ahead an Iora called. Humayun immediately looked around for Kullu to ensure the call was genuine! Meanwhile, a large grey bird flew into a tree ahead. "Grey Hornbill!" exclaimed Vinay and soon everyone was happily watching this interesting bird. In the meantime, the calling Iora appeared on a bush nearby, much to Humayun's relief.

Proceeding further, we saw a Spotted Munia, busily engaged in gathering nesting material. It kept disappearing into a tree some distance away. Vinay decided to investigate and disappeared into the bushes. Moorty meanwhile pulled out his watch and, after some intensive calculations, announced that the bird was making one trip per minute! Based upon this, he said, the bird would gather sixty twigs every hour! Expanding upon this theme, Humayun, Moorty and Cherie lagged behind a bit while the rest of the group went on ahead. Hastening to join them, we saw a small group of Yellow-eyed Babblers in the bushes. Green Bee-eaters flew about overhead. One alighted on a branch right over our heads. Cherie wanted to know why the bird was called "Green" Bee-eater when it was actually "Peach" coloured. Moorty and Humayun immediately looked and realized that their "Green Bee-eater" was, in fact, a Blue-tailed Bee-eater. Well done Cherie!

Up ahead, the group had been having quite a bit of luck. A Haircrested Drongo had been spotted. Aasheesh said he had seen the bird here in earlier trips too. Soon we were all peering hopefully up into the trees in the hope of spotting the creature. In the meantime, other birds began to emerge. Grey Tits flitted about in the trees. Jungle Babblers and Blossomheaded Parakeets screeched in flight. A Pygmy Woodpecker flew past. Tickell's Blue, Brown and Whitespotted Fantail Flycatchers appeared. But no Spangled Drongo!

Becoming impatient, Humayun and Vinay decided to strike out into the vegetation and see what was to be had. A possible Blackheaded Bunting was seen but the bird did not give us a good view so we couldn't really be certain. The bush, however, was rather disappointing from a twitcher's point of view. Activity was low, probably because of the heat, which seemed to have increased as the morning wore on. We rejoined the rest of the group when rumbling stomachs prompted us to return to the vehicles for breakfast. Strolling along the track towards the cars, excited exclamations from Moorty and Prasad alerted us to the presence of a couple of Goldmantled Chloropsis. They certainly lived up to their name of "Leaf Birds", because even when we had them fully focused in the 'binox', they were almost indistinguishable from the surrounding leaves until an incautious flutter gave them away. Further up, we heard a Greenish Leaf Warbler, Tree Pie and a little way into the bush, a couple of Little Minivets and a female Paradise Flycatcher was spotted.

Arriving at the vehicles, packed sandwiches and other delicacies were unpacked and soon everyone was happily munching away. While washing down this repast with hot tea, an interesting yelping call was heard. It sounded suspiciously like a Crested Hawk-Eagle, but we couldn't be absolutely certain. Looking around in the hope of spotting the source, Aasheesh saw a large Accipiter fly into a tree some little distance away. Our resident raptorphil, Humayun, decided to investigate and walked towards the tree, praying the bird would stay put. En-route, a rustling in some nearby bushes resolved itself into a mongoose nosing around an old nest; probably a bulbul's erstwhile home. The Accipiter proved to be a rather large female Shikra.

We now decided to head up a nearby hill which showed good tree cover. Since we generally do not go to this area on previous trips, it might be a chance to break new grounds, as it were, suggested Prasad. So, shouldering each, our separate loads, we set off. Soon a flowing stream blocked our path. Deciding that a little water never stopped a determined twitcher, we walked along the bank, looking for a ford across. Meantime, the rearguard had spotted a Redwinged Bush Lark and a family of Rufousbacked Shrikes. The front-runners meanwhile, had discovered a crossing and we all splashed across. Suddenly a large shadow passed overhead. Craning our necks we spotted a majestic Crested Serpent Eagle soaring overhead. With necks craned at uncomfortable angles and eyes smarting from looking into the sun, we followed the great bird's progress as it soared around the hill and was lost to sight. A wonderful sight indeed.

Reaching the forest-clad hill, we now searched for a way up. None appeared forthcoming so we contented ourselves with going in a little distance where we perched on convenient rocks and stones. Some of the youngsters however, particularly Prashast and Nikhil, were more determined and prevailed successfully upon Prasad and Vinay to accompany them further up the hill. Humayun decided to go as well in the hope of another glimpse of the Serpent Eagle. Crawling through the bush, we ascended quite high but the bush was so thick that we couldn't really get a good look over the canopy. So we rejoined the perched group, observing a Spurfowl scuttling away at our approach.

By now breakfast had been almost digested so thoughts turned towards lunch. Birding is hungry work and we had done quite a bit of that! Accordingly, we descended to the cars again, gathered our lunch boxes and repaired to a very decent spot on the streambed to enjoy the food. After much dissension and argument, we eventually found a place that met with the approval of the female members of the party so it was out with the foodstuffs; of which there was quite an extensive menu! The food seemed to appear and, just as quickly, disappear. Soon, stuffed and bloated, we lazed about. The younger members decided they wanted to paddle in the stream and set off. The rest of us lazed about contentedly, subconsciously noting a Goldenbacked Woodpecker, pointed out by Moorty, who was about the most alert member of the group at that particular point of time; if you forgot the frolicking youngsters!

Eventually, thoroughly refreshed, we decided to head back. The youngsters were hauled away from their paddling, protesting vociferously, and we headed back to the vehicles. After a cup of tea each, we climbed aboard and started back. All in all, a wonderful trip enjoyed by everyone, especially the very enthusiastic youngsters. 56 species of birds were seen.

A bird in hand or two in the bush?
Excerpts from an online debate on 'To collect or not to collect'

"'Collectors' are professional ornithologists, as are many birders, although the latter often have more field experience but less scientific training. Ideal partners, really, not diametrical opposites, especially since other demands on collecting ornithologists often preclude their spending as much time in the field as they would like. Those who believe that collecting is not necessary for accurate identification of many taxa in tropical avifaunas have not had this hypothesis rigorously tested, and are fooling themselves and perhaps their clientele.

"Compared with birding, collecting is much more difficult and demanding, vastly more expensive, extremely time-consuming, and difficult or impossible to arrange even with years of advance planning. However, collectors are documenting what they've encountered for all time, for science, and for everyone. Their records can be evaluated independently, and they can be corrected and updated. While birders' efforts can be really valuable, they are all-too-frequently not definitive because they lack adequate documentation or testability. Of course, tape-recordings and photo / video have changed this to some degree, and could do so to a much greater extent if people are willing to make the effort, rather than striving for maximum number of species seen per day or lifetime.

"Old specimens, while extremely important and useful, typically do not have enough data to resolve many important questions, e.g. soft parts, breeding and fat condition, elevation, habitat, . vocalizations. That, and the geographical gaps in collecting, are part of the reason new specimens are often necessary.

"As for new species, they often are not recognized as such in the field. Frequently they can only be determined as such by extensive after-the-fact comparisons with museum series of related taxa, which are often scattered around at different museums on different continents. It takes months or years of research to get it right, and a hasty description could result in erroneous conclusions. One has to thoroughly examine the literature just to establish whether any now-defunct but senior name might apply before concluding that something is really new. And there is the issue of deciding whether something should be described as a subspecies or species, which requires evaluation of all related taxa. Frequently the current taxonomy of the group involved requires revision before the new taxon can be described, which means extensive study of all the taxa. And the scientist involved rarely has sufficient time and/or funds to devote to all this, which is usually a side project.

"One point here is that you need to refer repeatedly to specimen material to examine all the features that you have found, after considerable study, to be important to that particular group. Many of these characters will not have been mentioned in the literature, or the literature will be misleading. If you try to work from photos and video, you will not be able to make accurate comparisons, and will almost certainly find that many of the salient features were not photographed. Many morphological characters are only evident on thorough examination of specimens, and while technically these could be photographed, they hardly ever are, especially in field conditions, and when you are not especially familiar with the group. Keeping all the relevant photos of a single individual photographed in the field together and getting them correctly labeled, and not mixed up with another individual, is another problem. Same thing applies to measurements: first, it's hard to measure living birds accurately, or to take a lot of measurements without stressing an already-stressed netted bird, and you can't go back and take more if you find them necessary later. Measurements of living birds are often not quite comparable with those of dried museum specimens, and one can't usually depend on being able to compare their own measurements with those taken by other ornithologists unless their methods of measurement are explicitly stated (which they hardly ever are).

"Much more could be (and has been) said along these lines. In any case, working together is essential, because there's so much to do and very little time in a losing battle with development / destruction. It takes mutual understanding and appreciation of different viewpoints, but that shouldn't be too difficult. Everyone just wants to see avian diversity properly documented and conserved, right?

"If birders want their contributions to be recognized by science, then they need to realize the limitations of birding. They need to be scrupulous in record-keeping and to gather the kinds of corroborative data (e.g., tapes, photos, field notes, *etc.*) that will help to clear up many of the uncertainties that now exist, rather than obfuscating our knowledge by adding noise (e.g., questionable and unsubstantiatable [*sic*] records). If birders are simply birding for enjoyment, and don't mind their records being scientifically ignored, then they can do as they please. It is where birding and science intersect that there is a problem. The fact is, birders *can* make much more valuable contributions to science, but their data have to be reliable. And, there's a lot more to evaluation of records than just relying on someone's reputation, because nobody knows everything, and everyone is human.

The idea that museums are building new collections from scratch... is just not happening these days, and every museum I've worked with has been forthcoming either with loan of specimens or examination during visits.

...*continued on page 4.*

LETTER FROM AN INSECT-HUNTING ORNITHOLOGIST—31

"Systematics is independent of the theory of descent. This is admitted today even by convinced evolutionists. The reasons are as follows: (1) Systematic methods provide definite results without reference to the idea of evolution; phylogenetics has no special methods, it is essentially the interpretation of systematic facts. (2) Systematics is a Science; phylogeny is a hypothesis of a historical process containing a fundamentally unverifiable element (Thompson) and can therefore never be the foundation of a science. (3) Systematics is investigation of facts; phylogenetics is often "a dangerous play with mere possibilities" (Hennig); Kant called it "a daring adventure of the mind".

"How many species shall be described? I answer: just as many as are present in nature, no more and no less. Ornithologists frequently speak of "simplification of the system" by reducing the number of species. If species which are not species are thereby eliminated, this tendency can only be welcomed. History teaches that there was no lack of such "species" in ornithology. But if some authors go so far as to ridicule the description of really new species [or allotting species status to deserving "subspecies"—K.G.] and to demand revisions or monographs in groups where is not yet the slightest possibility for revisionary work, then they hinder the freedom of research and forget that the principal task of a systematist is to make the species of nature known. . . . . In my opinion it would be nonsense to impose on the taxonomist any limitations other than those which are imposed by nature herself. It is a matter of course that modern standards must be applied in the case of new descriptions. Scientific systematics is more than a nomenclatural affair.

"The subspecies was first introduced into zoological nomenclature by the ornithologist H. Schlegel (1844) who added a third Latin name to the name of the species (trinary nomenclature). This practice was taken up later by entomologists and is sanctioned today by the International Rules of Nomenclature. With Darwin's *Origin of Species* (1859) began a movement which can be designated as devaluation of the species. Through the fusion of the doctrine of *Formenkreis* (Kleinschmidt) and *Rassenkreis* (Rensch) with the evolution theory the cult of races came into full swing. Originally destined to cleanse the "Augean stable" (Kleinschmidt) of ornithological nomenclature, it was eagerly sized [*sic*!—K.G.] upon by the neodarwinists (Huxley, Rensch, Mayr) and proclaimed as "one of the most productive working hypotheses of taxonomy" (Mayr). All this led to an inflation of infraspecific nomenclature which is a sympton [*sic*!—K.G.] of decline and deterioration of present-day systematics. Taxonomy is being reduced to an affair of nomenclature. Systematics becomes the science which gives a great many names to the same thing. . .

Wilson and Brown (1953, p. 102) characterize the situation with the following remark: "From our experience in the literature we are convinced that the subspecies concept is the most critical and disorderly area of modern systematic theory".

"Because of the abuse of "subspecies" in zoological nomenclature some authors "wish to abolish trinominalism root and branch" (Huxley). With that, there would be an end to "the tyranny of subspecific names". . . . . But things are not so simple if we look a little deeper into the matter and consult nature, instead of literature. "Study nature, not books", Agassiz used to say.

"In summary, I am defining the subspecies or race as a relatively constant, discontinuous variant of the species. Since not all species form races, this is not a universal category of fundamental significance, but rather a partial subcategory of species. The systematist should by no means neglect the study of subspecies, nor should he regard it his primary task. The first aim of all taxonomic research is the determination and definition of species as the fundamental units of the system."

[Thomas Borgmeier, 1963, "Basic questions of Systematics", Studia entomologica, 6: 539-540, 551-553, 559. Originally published in Systematic Zoology, 6: 53-69; 1957]

Perhaps the bird most exemplary of the British countryside, and that which endeared itself to my juvenile 'bird brain' in the 1960s, by way of an informal education through British literature, like the books of James Fisher and of Maxwell Knight, and that wonderful weekly, Country Life, which I loved reading in the then British Council's library in Bangalore, was the Wren, with the bonny, tongue-twisting, scientific name of *Troglodytes troglodytes*, given by Linnaeus. This Eurasian or Winter Wren is the sole representative of the family Troglodytidae resident in our area (and in the Old World), which otherwise has some 60 more species, in 15 genera, distributed in the New World. Here again I remain puzzled and confounded by the realignments suggested by Sibley & Monroe, who bracket the 'true' Wrens with the Tree Creepers (Certhiidae) and the Spotted Grey Creeper (Salpornithinae of the Sittidae) in their Certhiidae, as the subfamilies Troglodytinae and the Certhiinae tribes Certhiini (misspelt 'Certhinii' in the ANNOTATED CHECKLIST 1996: 152) and Salpornithini! The genus *Troglodytes* Vieillot has 5 species distributed in the Holarctic and Neotropical Regions and in a tiny area in extreme north-western Africa.

Two of the 5 world species of the family Cinclidae reside in our sub-continent. All these Dippers belong to a single genus *Cinclus* Borkhausen and occur only in swift flowing mountain streams into which they dive, swim and walk on the bottom, searching for insect, crustacean, mollusc, flatworm and fish food. Our 2 species also occur in Europe, north-west Africa and central, eastern and south-eastern Asia, while the other 3 are found along the western sides of North and South America down to north-west Argentina.

The Prunellidae, the gregarious, ground feeding Hedge Sparrows or Accentors, are a dozen essentially Palaearctic species of the genus *Prunella* Vieillot, of which 9 occur in our region, 2 of these being winter visitors and couple more recorded as stragglers in Baluchistan and in Ladakh. Sibley & Monroe perhaps rightly treat the Prunellinae as a subfamily of the Passeridae.

Our region is home to 25 species of Tits, or Titmice, of the family Paridae. These are grouped into the following 3 subfamilies which together inhabit North America south to Guatemala, and all Eurasia (except the Arctic Circle) and Africa (except Madagascar and most of the Sahara) to Japan, Formosa (= Taiwan) and "Wallace's Line". The 'true' Tits belong to the Parinae, two less than 50 known from the world, placed in 3 genera (*Parus* Linnaeus, *Melanochlora* Lesson, *Sylviparus* Burton) all of which occur in our region, the two latter being monotypic and peculiar to the Oriental region. Fifteen Indian species of *Parus*, all resident breeders, except 2 recorded as stragglers or vagrants from Chitral and Hunza (now in "Pakistan occupied Kashmir"), include these 5 endemics - the White-winged Black Tit (*Parus nuchalis*), plus the Bar-winged, Rufous-bellied, Yellow-cheeked, and Blyth's Crested Tits (*Parus melanolophus*, *P. rubidiventris*, *P. xanthogenys*, *P. aplonotus*). The Remizinae or Penduline Tits (10 known species in 4 genera) have 3 species in our area, belonging to 2 genera, *Cephalopyrus* Bonaparte and *Remiz* Jarocki, being resident and also winter visitors. The Aegithalinae (treated as a distinct family by Sibley & Monroe), or Long-tailed Tits, occur in most of the Eurasian continental landmass, and also in Central America, as 8 species in 3 genera. Five species of *Aegithalos* Hermann are resident in Baluchistan and all across the Himalayas, of which 4 are endemic here – Hume's, White-cheeked, White-throated and Rufous-fronted Tits (*Aegithalos manipurnesis*, *A. leucogenys*, *A. niveogularis*, *A. iouschistos*).

The resident Nuthatches, Wall Creepers and Spotted Grey Creeper again represent 3 subfamilies of the Sittidae, which inhabit most of North America, Eurasia, extreme north-west Africa and Australia, and total some 27 species in 5 genera. The Sittinae in our region comprise 9 Nuthatches belonging to *Sitta* Linnaeus, of which the Kashmiri and Godwin-Austen's Nuthatches (*Sitta cashmirensis*, *S. nagaensis*) are endemic here. The Tichodrominae includes a single genus (*Tichodroma* Illiger, and species (Wall Creeper), which ranges from southern Europe through northern Africa and the Middle East to the Himalayas and into China. The Salpornithinae is also known by a single (?) species of the genus *Salpornis* G.R. Gray, which is stated to occur as two hugely geographically isolated and resident populations in middle Africa and then in central India! The Spotted Grey Creeper, *S. spilonotus*, was described by Franklin from the Vindhyas, and I believe needs to be recognized as endemic to India and distinct from the African population which is reproductively isolated, and allopatric, from ours. Sibley & Monroe place this Creeper as a tribe of the Certhiidae, which is treated below.

Tree Creepers are placed in the family Certhiidae, usually by themselves but, as indicated above, also include the Wrens and the Spotted Grey Creeper, according to Sibley & Monroe! Sticking to Ripley's NEW SYNOPSIS, I recognize only *Certhia* Linnaeus in this family, with 4 resident Indian region species, of which Blyth's Tree Creeper (*Certhia nipalensis*) is endemic here. A total of 5 species of this genus occur on the North American and Eurasian continents.

We come now to the Motacillidae, which comprise the Wagtails and Pipits, and include 5 genera and 53 world species, but, as I see it, many of the so-called "subspecies", of Wagtails especially, need species status. These mainly ground frequenting, tail wagging, largely migratory birds occur all over the world, except in the extreme Arctic Circle and on many Oceanic islands, the Wagtails being absent in the Western Hemisphere. Sibley & Monroe treat this group as a subfamily of the Passeridae (= Ploceidae)! In the Indian region there occur 15 species of resident and wintering Pipits (*Anthus* Bechstein) of which Jerdon's Rock Pipit and the Nilgiris Pipit (*Anthus similis*, *A. nilghiriensis*) are endemic to peninsular India. Our Wagtails consist of what Ripley treated as 2 resident and 4 migrant species of *Motacilla* Linnaeus and a single species of the monotypic *Dendronanthus* Blyth, with the Forest Wagtail (*D. indicus*) as its lone species resident in eastern Asia down to southern China and north-east India and migrating also to the Western Ghats in winter. Three species of our *Motacilla* are divided into 16 "subspecies" that winter in our region, but I prefer to recognize a total of 16 Indian region species of *Motacilla* including what I believe are fairly distinct forms deserving acknowledgement of this status. The Large Pied Wagtail, *M. maderaspatensis*, is endemic to our sub-continent.

The Flowerpeckers (Dicaeidae) and the Sunbirds and Spiderhunters (Nectariniidae) are treated as distinct families by Ripley, but Sibley & Monroe place them as tribes of a single subfamily of Nectariniidae. Adhering to the former, the Dicaeidae, a peculiarly "Indo-Australian" family (not New Zealand and the Pacific Islands east of the Solomons), has 58 species in 7 genera of highly arboreal flowerpeckers, many associated with mistletoes and eating their berries, besides insects and taking flower nectar. In our area there are 11 resident species of *Dicaeum* Cuvier of which 4 are endemic here – Legge's, Tickell's, Jerdon's and Hume's Flowerpeckers (*Dicaeum vincens*, *D. erythrorynchos*, *D. concolor*, *D. virescens*).

The Zosteropidae or White-eyes are 84 rather restless, arboreal species (in 11 genera) that are tropical Old World in distribution, from Africa through south and south-east Asia to Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific Ocean islands. Our region has only 2 resident species of *Zosterops* Vigors & Horsfield, the Ceylonese White-eye (*Z. ceylonensis*) being an endemic here.

The remaining three families are the strict Passeriform ("sparrow-like") birds which will be analysed in the next, and final, Letter of mine dealing with our avifauna's taxonomy.

[**Errata: Letter # 30**—Page 3, text Para 2, line 9 from bottom should read "Ceylonese Rufous"; Page 4, Para 3, Line 4, "Andes" should read "Rockies", Line 6 should read "I recognize 110 resident and migratory species", Line 12 "Abroscopus" should be in *italics* and *Tickellia* is correct; Last Para, Line 10 should read "and 5 Blackbirds, 12 Thrushes, a Fieldfare and a Redwing".]

— **Dr Kumar Ghorpadé**, 1861 Bethel Street, Bangalore 560 043 & e-mail: varanus.kg@mailcity.com

...continued from page 2

Of course existing material must be examined, but world holdings are often wholly inadequate. As an example, for scops-owls, several island taxa are known from one, two, or three specimens only, and for some islands, no specimens exist, making the taxonomic allocation of the populations totally speculative. A single specimen is not sufficient for appreciation of variation (and hence taxonomy) in a group such as scops owls.

"Some people are under the impression that disreputable specimen dealers are still around; this is simply not the case. A few did exist long ago, to be sure.

"No new species belongs to anyone. However, a certain amount of discretion is and always has been required when one is naming a new species (or working up some other discovery), particularly after the investment of a great deal of one's time, effort, and resources into the project. As unpopular as this may be among amateurs, this is inevitable for multiple reasons, including the need for practicing ornithologists to keep their jobs by actually publishing worthwhile papers. (Those who have not had to deal with academic credit systems cannot begin to appreciate this unfortunate fact of life.) It should also be recognized that not all competitive efforts are by reputable *vs.* disreputable parties, and who actually 'discovered' something may be a matter of opinion. The contributions of all concerned (including birders) should surely be recognized in some manner in the finished product.

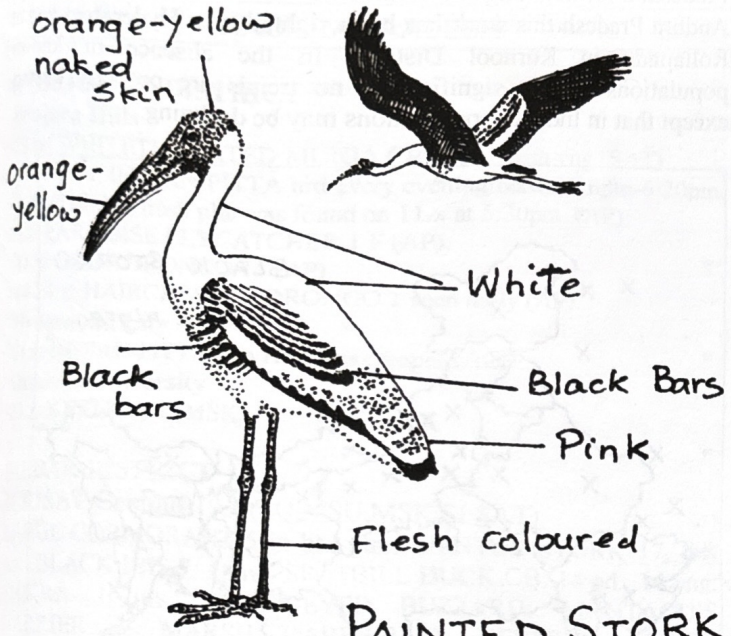
"Delays in publication of new species should be avoided, certainly, but not at the expense of proper scientific study. Such delays are not significant where they result in temporary untwitchability of a new species, but become very much so when they impact on conservation matters and ability of authors / editors of comprehensive books to include the new taxa in their forthcoming works (for completeness' sake).

"Use of sensational terms such as 'slaughtering', 'rampant', *etc.*, takes the discussion out of the realm of science. Human-caused destruction (without lasting benefit) of millions of birds is caused by domestic cats, introduced rats, glass windows, radio towers, pesticides, the pet trade (even if the slaughter is largely deferred in this case), hunting for food, 'medicine', and fun, and above all, habitat loss. This is not to mention natural mortality, which is also huge. The tiny number of birds taken worldwide by collectors for museums does not even form a blip on the scale of avian mortality, and does provide a lasting and necessary scientific benefit. It is hardly worth even discussing, particularly given the lack of attention paid to most of the other, major factors."

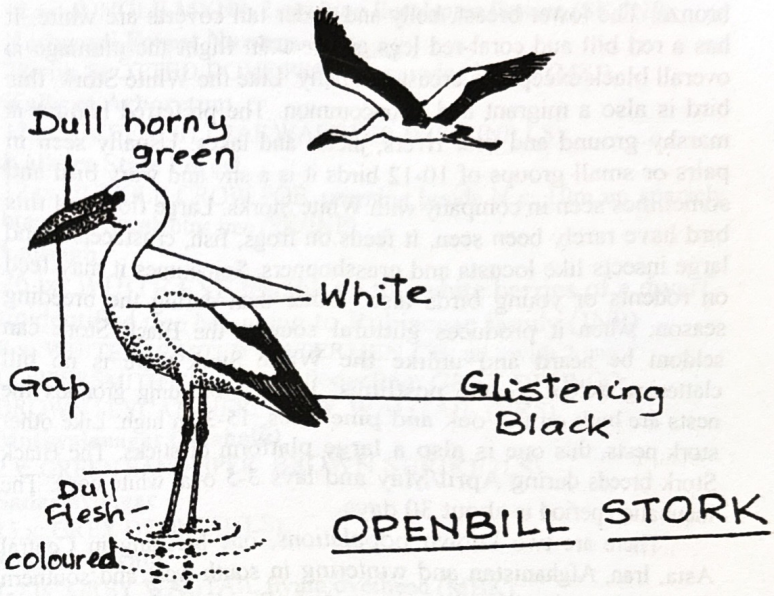
Pam Rasmussen: rasmussen.pamela@nmnh.si.edu. *In* orientalbirding@egroups.com.

FIELD CRAFT *By* Siraj Taher & Sachin Jaltare [4]

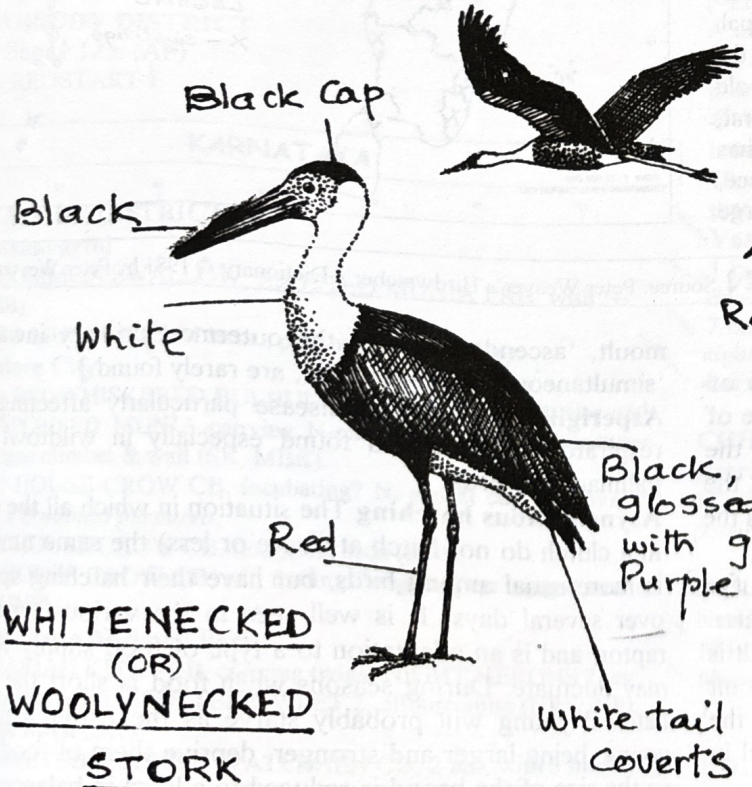
STORKS (Family Ciconidae) are longlegged diurnal and chiefly terrestrial birds. Their main habitats and feeding grounds are marshes, cultivated fields, lakes, rivers and other water bodies. They are mainly black and white with metallic sheen of purple, green and bronze with long and large pointed bills, broad wings and short tails. They fly with their necks stretched out.



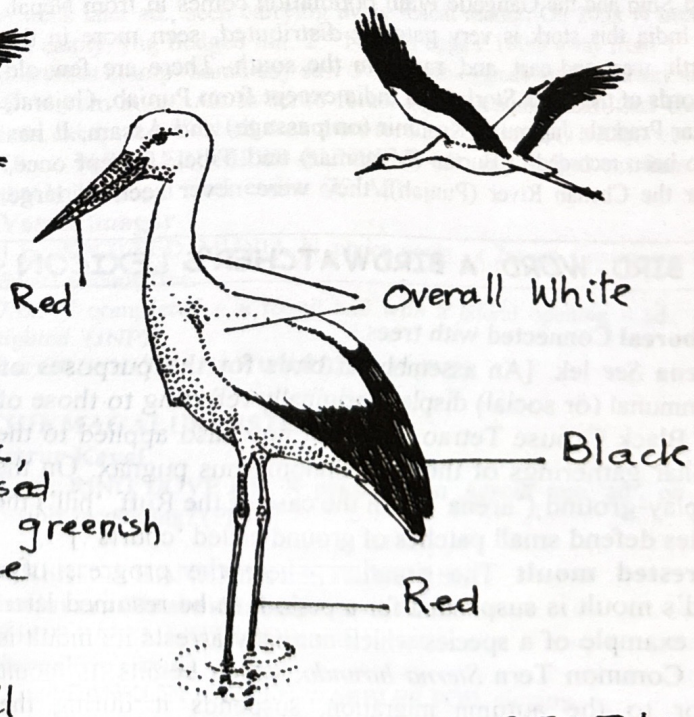
PAINTED STORK



OPENBILL STORK



WHITE NECKED (OR) WOOLY NECKED STORK



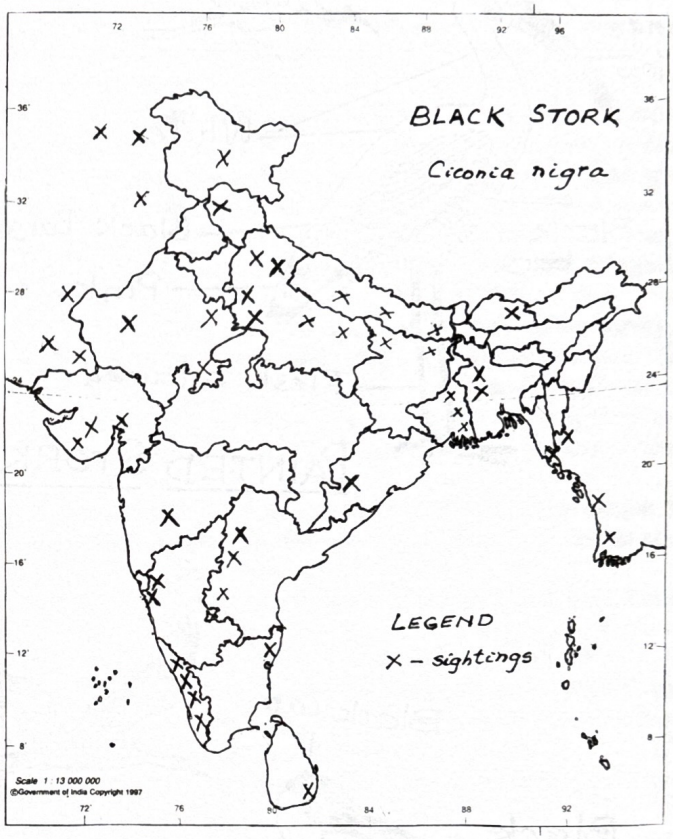
WHITE STORK

SPOTLIGHT: Black Stork *Ciconia nigra* By Siraj A. Taher

This column focuses on birds that are listed in the Red Data Book of BirdLife International as threatened / highly threatened species. Readers are requested to send information about these birds to the Society.

Like other storks the Black Stork is also a very large tall bird with a long, stout and heavy looking straight bill. The wings are long and the tail is short and it has long and bare legs. They fly with the neck extended and sometimes soar at great heights. The Black Stork while standing is about 106cm to the top of the head, almost the same as the White Stork. Its upper plumage, including head, neck and upper breast is black glossed with green, purple and bronze. The lower breast, belly and under tail coverts are white. It has a red bill and coral-red legs and feet. In flight the plumage is overall black except the breast and belly. Like the White Stork, this bird is also a migrant and is uncommon. The preferred habitat is marshy ground and near rivers, jheels and lakes. Usually seen in pairs or small groups of 10-12 birds it is a shy and wary bird and sometimes seen in company with White Storks. Large flocks of this bird have rarely been seen. It feeds on frogs, fish, crustaceans and large insects like locusts and grasshoppers. Sometimes it may feed on rodents or young birds also. Other than during the breeding season, when it produces guttural sounds, the Black Stork can seldom be heard and unlike the White Stork there is no bill clattering except by the nestlings. In their breeding grounds the nests are built on tall oak and pine trees, 15-30m high. Like other stork nests, this one is also a large platform of sticks. The Black Stork breeds during April/May and lays 3-5 oval white eggs. The incubation period is about 30 days.

There are two known populations, one breeding in Central Asia, Iran, Afghanistan and wintering in south-west and southern Asia and another breeding in eastern Russia and migrating to Eastern China and Korea. In the sub-continent, the Black Stork winters in Pakistan and northern India coming from Baluchistan and Sind and the Gangetic Plain population comes in from Nepal. In India this stork is very patchily distributed, seen more in the north, west and east, and, rarely in the south. There are few old records of the Black Stork from India except from Punjab, Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir (on passage) and Assam. It has also been recorded in Burma (Myanmar) and Tibet. Except once, near the Chenab River (Punjab), they were never seen in large flocks. Recent sightings are more from Gujarat, Rajasthan, especially Bharatpur, Assam, Gangetic plains and Kashmir. In the south, there have been occasional sightings in Kerala and Andhra Pradesh, a few sightings in Tamil Nadu and one from Sri Lanka. In Andhra Pradesh this stork has been sighted near Hyderabad and at Rollapadu in Kurnool District. In the absence of known populations of any significance, no trends are properly known except that in India the populations may be declining.



BIRD-*WORD*: A BIRDWATCHER'S LEXICON Source: Peter Weaver's Birdwatcher's Dictionary © 1981 by Peter Weaver.

Arboreal Connected with trees.

Arena *See* lek. [An assembly of birds for the purposes of communal (or social) display, originally referring to those of the Black Grouse Tetrao tetrix but now also applied to the similar gatherings of the Ruff Philomachus pugnax. On the display-ground ('arena' or, in the case of the Ruff, 'hill') the males defend small patches of ground called 'courts'.]

Arrested moult The situation where the progress of a bird's moult is suspended for a period, to be resumed later. An example of a species which normally arrests its moult is the Common Tern *Sterna hirundo*, which begins its moult prior to the autumn migration, suspends it during the migration itself and then continues to moult after arrival in its winter quarters.

Ascendant moult *See* descendant moult. [The usual sequence of MOULT in which the primary feathers are replaced from the carpal joint outwards. The other types of moult, 'ascendant' (from the outermost primary inwards), 'simultaneous' and 'irregular', are rarely found.]

Asperigillosis A fungal disease particularly affecting the respiratory system, and found especially in wildfowl and gallinaceous birds.

Asynchronous hatching The situation in which all the eggs in a clutch do not hatch at (more or less) the same time, as is more usual among birds, but have their hatching spread over several days. It is well seen in the various types of raptor, and is an adaptation to a type of food supply which may fluctuate. During seasons when food is short the later hatched young will probably starve as the earlier hatched young, being larger and stronger, deprive them of food, and so the size of the brood is reduced to a level in balance with the available food supply. In years of plenty all the young may be able to survive. In 'synchronous hatching' all the eggs hatch at more or less the same time.

BIRDING NOTES Compiled by Aasheesh Pittie

This column publishes birding notes in brief telegraphic form, from **Andhra Pradesh, Goa, Haryana, Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra, Punjab, Rajasthan & Tamil Nadu** on interesting and significant sightings and behaviour like breeding, feeding, migration, nesting, *etc*. Notes on flowering and fruiting trees and their relationship with birds are also welcome. English names and classification follow, S.D. Ripley's *A Synopsis of the Birds of India and Pakistan* (1982, 2nd ed.) and scientific nomenclature, T. Inskipp, N. Lindsey & W. Duckworth's *An Annotated Checklist of the Birds of the Oriental Region* (1996). Unless specified, all observations are for 1999. Abbreviations, Contributors, Notes, Regional Referees, *etc*., are at the end. For selection of breeding criteria 'Probable, Possible, Confirmed', see *Pitta* # 82, February 1998, p. 4.

ANDHRA PRADESH

HYDERABAD DISTRICT

Banjara Hills

19.ix: WHITETHROATED MUNIA CB, 1 ad., with yng (SAT).

29.ix-16.x: INDIAN PITTA hrd every evening between 6pm-6:20pm. A dead bird in fresh plm was found on 11.x at 5:30pm. (AP).

6.x: PARADISE FLYCATCHER 1 F (AP).

11.x: GREY DRONGO 15 (AP).

14-24.x: HAIRCRESTED DRONGO 1 seen daily (AP).

Hyderabad City

24.x: INDIAN PITTA 1 in Hibiscus creeper (AO).

Osmania University

23.x: KESTREL 1 (MSK).

MEDAK DISTRICT

ICRISAT Campus 19.x (SQ,MSU,MSK,SJ,SAT)

LARGE CORMORANT 5 in br., plm; PAINTED STORK 17, few juv.; BLACK IBIS 7, 1 juv.; SPOTBILL DUCK CB, 14 ad., 14 yng; SHIKRA 1 juv.; WHITE-EYED BUZZARD; MONTAGU'S HARRIER 1; MARSH HARRIER 2; KESTREL; GREEN SANDPIPER 2; GREAT HORNED OWL 1; BLUETAILED BEE-EATER 2; ASHY SWALLOW-SHRIKE 4; STREAKED FANTAIL WARBLER CB, 1 N with 5 eggs; PLAIN WREN-WARBLER CB, 1 N; COLLARED BUSHCHAT.

RANGAREDDY DISTRICT

Osman Sagar 12.x (AP)

BLACK REDSTART 1.

KARNATAKA

BANGALORE DISTRICT

Badamanavarthi

19.ix: COMMON SWALLOW; SPOTTED MUNIA PRB, with N-mat. (SB).

3.x: RED MUNIA PRB, M in br., plm, with N-mat (SB).

Bangalore City

17.viii: REDWHISKERED BULBUL CB, a pair making sorties with food; SPOTTED MUNIA carrying N-mat., to N *c*.2m up between Asparagus climber & wall (SK, MBK).

19.viii: HOUSE CROW CB, incubating? N, a neat cup of twigs, *c*. 6m up a *Bauhinia purpurea*.

21.viii: HOUSE CROW CB, fledgeling seen (JNP).

24.ix: HOUSE CROW CB, ad., feeding fledgeling on winged termite alates (JNP).

Bannerghatta National Park

11.x: PARIAH KITE PRB, carrying twigs; NIGHT HERONS 2 juv., flying across pond; SPOTTED OWLET 2, allopreening (NRS/JNP).

Cubbon Park (SK)

21.ix: WHITEBREASTED WATERHEN CB, 2 ad., with 3 black yng in pond opposite Bal Bhavan; PARIAH KITE carrying N-matl.

24.ix: WHITEBREASTED WATERHEN CB, same fly sighted again.

10.x: WHITEBREASTED WATERHEN CB 1 ad., with 2 yng; ROSERINGED PARAKEET PRB, F inspecting a N-hole on *Castenospermum australe* tree, little later seen widening a barbet's N-hole by peeling bark (JNP); LARGE BILLED LEAF WARBLER hrd (MBK,JNP).

Gotegere

12.ix: JUNGLE MYNA 2, probing Eucalyptus flowers (SK,JNP).

Kadugodi Forest Nursery

22.viii: SPOTTED DOVE PRB, ad., carrying N-mat (MSJ).

Kalkere Arboretum

12.ix: GREENISH LEAF WARBLER H (SK,JNP,LS).

Kalkere State Forest

12.ix: JUNGLE CROW POB, preening beside N *c*. 10m up sparsely branched Eucalyptus tree (SK/JNP).

Lalbagh

26.ix: WHITE EYE feeding on the white berries of a dwarf unidentified tree belonging to Rubiaceae family (JNP).

8.x: WHITEBREASTED WATERHEN CB, ad., with 2 yng; COPPERSMITH CB ad., with fledgeling; GREY DRONGO; BROWN FLYCATCHER; GREY WAGTAIL (NRS).

Muthyalanagar (Jalahalli)

2.x: GREEN SANDPIPER; BROWN SHRIKE (LS).

Sadashivnagar

15.x: GREY DRONGO (LS).

Shankarpuram

1-7.ix: GREY WAGTAIL flying overhead (MBK).

Somanahalli

1.viii: ASHY WREN WARBLER CB, N with eggs in Chromalena (=Eupatorium) *c*.1m up – N ball shaped with lateral opening on top; A week later ad., seen carrying away feacal matter; On 10.ix N intact and empty, yng fledged out. 2nd N with eggs *c*.100m away from 1st N in a grass clump. Same day saw 3rd N with eggs about ½km away and 4th N 1km away. All in scrub forest sighted on same day. One week later except the 1st N all the others torn and destroyed (TNAP).

10.ix: PURPLERUMPED SUNBIRD CB, yng fledged out from N that had 2 yng a week earlier (TNAP).

Vasanthnagar

1.ix: SPOTTED MUNIA N under const., *c*.2m up *Cassia siamea* dwarf avenue tree.

7.ix: N completed – a round ball with a lateral opening – ad., not sighted. (JNP).

4.x: GREENISH LEAF WARBLER H (JNP).

CHIKMAGALUR DISTRICT

Basrur Kaval

11.viii: RING DOVE CB, N placed in an Acacia tree, ad., on N, possibly incubating? (PKD).

DAKSHINA KANNADA DISTRICT (UHK)

Nandavara (Bantwal taluk)

12.ix.99 PARIAH KITE POB, with N-mat.

Mangalore city

13.ix: FRANKLIN'S WREN-WARBLER POB, singing.

KOLAR DISTRICT

Nandi Hills

18.x: BLUEHEADED ROCK THRUSH; BLUE ROCK THRUSH; PIED GROUND THRUSH (M,F) 6 pairs (SK).

MANDYA DISTRICT

Cauvery Wildlife Sanctuary/Bhimeshwari
25.ix: COMMON SWALLOW (NRS)

KERALA

WYNAAD DISTRICT
Wynaad Wildlife Sanctuary
10.ix: GREY WAGTAIL (AM).

TAMIL NADU

NILGIRIS DISTRICT
Masinagudi
6&7.ix: GREY WAGTAIL *c.* 10, around 4pm on a rooftop (AM).

ABBREVIATIONS: Ab-abundant; ad-adult/s; br-breeding; C-common/ly; CB-confirmed breeding; const-construction/ing; *c.*-approximately; disp-display/ing; F-female; flt-flight; fly-family; freq-frequent/ly; hrd-heard; id-identify/ied; imm-immature; inc-include/ing; Is-Island; juv-juvenile; LM-local migrant; M-male; mat-material; N-nest/ing/s; POB-possible breeding; PRB-probable breeding; plm-plumage; RF-Reserve Forest; Resp-respectively; Tlk-Taluk; vil-village; WL-wildlife; yng-young.

CONTRIBUTORS: A.Madhusudan (AM); A.Osman (AO); A.Pittie (AP); J.N.Prasad (JNP); L.Shyamal (LS); M.B.Krishna (MBK); M.S.Jayanth (MSJ); M.S.Kulkarni (MSK); M.Shafaat Ulla (MSU); N.R.Swamy (NRS); P.K.Dinesh (PKD); S.A.Taher (SAT); S.Balachandran (SB); S.Jaltare (SJ); S.Karthikeyan (SK); S.Quader (SQ); S.Ranade (SR); T.N.A.Perumal (TNAP); U.Harish Kumar (UHK);

REGIONAL REFEREES: Andhra Pradesh: Aasheesh Pittie; Goa: Heinz Lainer; Haryana: Harkirat S. Sangha; Karnataka: J.N. Prasad; Kerala: P.O. Nameer; Maharashtra: Nitin Jamdar; Punjab: H.S. Sangha; Rajasthan: H.S. Sangha; Tamil Nadu: V. Santharam.

NOTES & NEWS

Calendar of Events

September-December 1999: 1st Sunday of every month: BSAP's Gardens & Semi-wilderness Area Surveys. The project continues for another 6 months. Fortnightly surveys reduced to monthly. Further details from K.C. Ramakrishna (3751652) / H.Taher (3352607).

BNHS Programmes (Complete details from BNHS 022-2821811. Camps only for members of BNHS, nature-walks & talks open to all):

* Annual Nature Camps for 1999-2000:

South India: Rangannathittu, Kabini River, Nagarhole, Top Slip, Parambikulam & Mukurti NP. Non-refundable registration of Rs500/- on 4.ix.1999 (*Late news, but try your luck*!). 2 16-day batches of 23 each. **1.xii-16.xii.1999:** 1st batch. **18.xii-2.i.2000:** 2nd batch.

North India: Kishanpur Wildlife Sanctuary & Dudhwa National Park. Non-refundable registration of Rs500/- on 13.xi.1999. 2 6-day batches of 23 each. **20-25.ii.2000:** 1st batch. **27.ii-4.iii.2000:** 2nd batch.

* BNHS Bird Banding Training Programme for 1999-2000 season: **15.xi-24.xi:** Kabartal, (Bihar). **26.xi-5.xii:** Assam (site to be selected). **22.xii-31.xii:** Point Calimere (TN). **10.ii-5.iii.2000:** Andamans. **20.iii-29.iii.2000:** Point Calimere (TN). **31.iii-9.iv.2000:** Tirupati (AP).

12.xi.1999: Sálim Ali Bird Count—organized by BNHS.

23.ix.2000—1.x.2000, Nepal: International Symposium on Galliformes. Info., from Prof. A.H. Musavi, Secretary, W.P.A. India, 6 Kabeer Colony, Anoop Shahar Road, Aligarh 202002.

LITERARY WRENDITIONS

"The rooks too were keeping one of their annual festivities; soaring round the tree tops until it looked as if a vast net with thousands of black knots in it had been cast up into the air; which, after a few moments sank slowly down upon the trees until every twig seemed to have a knot at the end of it. Then, suddenly, the net would be thrown into the air again in a wider circle this time, with the utmost clamour and vociferation, as though to be thrown into the air and settle slowly down upon the tree tops were a tremendously exciting experience." — Virginia Woolf *in* The Death of the Moth.

CONTACT CALLS

"Your 'Spotlight' in *Pitta* (# 102, October 1999) is interesting...There is no doubt that *Ciconia ciconia asiaticus* occurs in India, we do not watch the birds carefully in the field." Please see: Jadeja, V., Vyas, R. & Parasharya, B.M. (1998): Rrecord of *Ciconia ciconia asiaticus* from Indian territory. *J.B.N.H.S.* 95: 113, for further information.

—**B.M. Parasharya**, Anand

For Private Circulation Only

For information, write to: Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh, PO Box 45, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad 500034, India.
Editors: Aasheesh Pittie (3350683) & Siraj A Taher (3352607) **E-mail**: AASHEESH@HD1.VSNL.NET.IN
Membership (Rs): Admission=20; Ordinary=100, Student=25 per annum; Life=1,000. *Outstation cheques not accepted.*

IPTTA

15.XII 1999

Bulletin of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh No. 104 : December 1999

Indexed 13/2/2001

PROGRAMME

FIELD OUTING: 19-xii-1999: Ibrahimpatnam Tank, Nagarjunasagar Road: Members are requested to reach the destination by 7.30 am and assemble at the beginning of the bund. This will be a half-day trip. APSRTC bus route # 277 from Women's College, Koti and Imliban Bus Depot terminates at Ibrahimpatnam village, but will stop on request on the bund. **26-xii-1999: Bibinagar Tank, Warangal HW, Nalgonda District:** Please reach destination by 7.30 am. We meet at the first railway crossing after Ghatkesar, on the main road. This will be a half-day trip.

INDOOR MEETING: 20-xii-1999, 6 p.m.: Vidyaranya High School, Opp., Secretariat, Saifabad, Hyderabad 500004.

NOTES & NEWS

Happenings at the Society: Field Trip to Umamaheshwaram—28.xi.1999

Humayun Taher

The BSAP trip to Umamaheshwaram promised to be exciting and entertaining and the members who turned up at Shanbhag Hotel in the early hours of Sunday morning were all looking forward to a great time. We piled into the cars and set off at 7.30 a.m.

Umamaheshwaram is quite far from Hyderabad on the Srisailam road. The area we drove through was quite rich in bird life and we notched up some interesting birds en-route such as Kestrels and Grey Partridges.

Our first major stop, (if we don't count the halt for tea at Amangal), was at the Dindi reservoir. This is a large water body about 80 km from Hyderabad and is generally quite worthwhile for birding. We stopped the cars on the road and ran up the bund to see what it offered.

The first thing we noticed was that the water level, compared to earlier visits, had dropped considerably. However, this appeared to be a mixed blessing because the low water attracted a large number of wading birds. We quickly notched up Openbill Storks and three species of Egrets (Large, Median and Little). We also saw a raft of Coots, a large flock of Indian River Terns flying about, and a couple of Blackheaded Gulls floating on the water. On the far shore, a flock of Little Stints flew around and a few Black Ibis were seen sweeping the shallows for food. Just as we decided that we should perhaps be getting along, a warning call from K.C. alerted us to the presence of three Flamingos feeding in the shallow waters alongside the Black Ibis. We also saw a Little Ringed Plover, pointed out by Sachin who was gazing at the water as though to draw inspiration for his next portrait.

We now decided to continue to our destination. Accordingly, having swept the lake with the binox one last time to ensure we had missed nothing, we set off again, reaching Umamaheshwaram at around 12.30 in the afternoon; quite a late hour for birding. But someone forgot to tell the birds that! They were waiting for us.

Having arrived, we quickly shouldered our loads and set off. One of the first things we observed was the profusion of Bonnet Macaques. Since Umamaheshwaram boasts a large temple, it seems that the monkeys are welcome visitors. They seemed far more at ease than some of the visitors themselves! We learned quite soon that it is most unwise to try and eat something (particularly bananas) with these creatures in the vicinity. Having decided that it was quite rude of us to not offer them any bananas, the animals dispensed with the formalities and decided to help themselves, which they did quite efficiently. We had to lock the food in the cars to escape their unwelcome attentions!

Having secured our lunches, we now proceeded with the birding. The habitat at Umamaheshwaram is ideal for woodland species, particularly those species that favour tall trees with not too much secondary growth. We observed some interesting species such as Leaf Birds (Goldfronted Chloropsis) and the beautiful little Whitebrowed Fantail Flycatchers. Spotting a bright yellow bird in the trees on the plateau, K.C. and Humayun determined to walk up and ascertain what it was. Climbing up had the advantage in that it presented a grand view over the forest canopy and allowed the sighting of such interesting species as Crested Hawk-Eagle, Little Minivet and Paradise Flycatcher. Verditer Flycatchers were sporting in the bushes and a Whitebrowed Fantail Flycatcher regarded us suspiciously from a small rock where he seemed to be performing a little dance. A couple of Yellowthroated Bulbuls were sighted and some Large Green Barbets were busily feeding in a tree laden with berries of some sort. White-eyes were active in the trees and a family of Tree Pies were disporting themselves in the bushes under the tall trees. Arriving at the plateau, the bright yellow bird was identified as a Yellowcheeked Tit. A couple of Whitebellied Drongos were playing in the trees. One of them did his best to convince us that he was a Shikra by loudly and accurately imitating the calls of that hawk. Finding that his audience was not at all convinced, he soon gave up.

Our thoughts now turned towards lunch and it was decided to descend to the rest of the group and canvas their views on the subject. Dwelling on this we were quite startled by a loud whooping call coming from the hill across the valley. The call can best be described as a booming "whoomp_whoomp_whoomp". These were the calls of the Blackfaced or Grey Langur monkeys. A couple of these simians were spotted leaping about in a tree on the very top of the hill. These monkeys are essentially forest species and it was quite an experience listening to their natural calls. It was easy to imagine that the call, if heard at night, might sound quite eerie and thrilling.

Having rejoined the rest of the group, the idea of lunch was proposed and greeted with great enthusiasm so, without further ado, we all legged it towards the vehicles where the lunch boxes were stacked. All, that is, except Sachin and Srikanth who were busy with pen and brush and already in action on the wonderful scenery surrounding us. The rest of us, however, with single-minded determination, headed towards the lure of food and we were all soon happily munching away at an amazing variety of delicious dishes, which would not have shamed a good restaurant! Presently, stuffed and bloated, and feeling very contented indeed, thoughts turned towards a bit more birding. The more active members decided to walk down the steps connecting the temple where we stood, to the temple at the foot of the hill, which route went through the bush and could result in some interesting bird sightings. A few others decided to use a different route to gain the same end and walked down the ghat road itself. This route proved to be a far better choice as was pointed out a few minutes after starting by the sighting of a goodish flock of Imperial Green Pigeons which came flying out of the forest and settled on a large and rather bare tree, affording a good view through the binox. Further up the road, a couple of Roseringed Parakeets and a Franklin's Wren Warbler also put in an appearance.

Having gained the lower reaches of the hill, some of the more enterprising and active members disappeared into the surrounding bush for more birding. A lone male Purple Sunbird appeared and did his best to dazzle us with his iridescent purple plumage and he may well have succeeded had it not been for the sudden appearance of a far more interesting and dazzling bird in the shape of a Blackheaded Oriole. Loud "OOHS!" and "AAHS!" indicative of excitement and rapture echoed through the forest and sent both the Oriole and Sunbird hurrying for cover. Well satisfied with this offering, we now decided to get back home. Accordingly, piling once more into our respective vehicles, we turned towards the city, well satisfied with the trip. Although the number of species seen was not very large, about 60 species (including those seen en-route and at Dindi), the variety of birds was most interesting and enjoyable. It was quite an interesting trip.

The Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS), with the cooperation and funding of two UK based conservation organizations, BirdLife International (BLI) and the Royal Society for Protection of Birds (RSPB) has started a programme to identify Important Bird Areas (IBA) in India. For this, BNHS, which is the BLI partner in India, is setting up a network of ornithologists, birdwatchers and conservation organizations to be called Indian Bird Conservation Network (IBCN). As part of this project, a regional workshop (the 5th in the series being conducted all over the country) was organized in Hyderabad on 18-19 November 1999 at the Osmania University Campus. More than 35 participants from Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh (AP) took part. This workshop was conducted to identify IBA in Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka states. After an introduction to the project by the BNHS/IBCN staff and general discussions, the participants were divided into two groups, AP and Karnataka, for deliberations on IBA in their respective states. Members presented theier cases for inclusion of sites as IBA with strong reason in support of their case. After long discussions and much deliberations on 65 suggested sites in AP, 17 sites were selected as possible IBA of which 9 are already protected areas (sanctuaries, national parks, *etc*) and 18 are unprotected—of the 19 new sites proposed, 7 are within protected areas and have been included for some specific reasons; 9 areas are unprotected and 3 have been included for regional consideration. Similarly, IBA were shortlisted for Karnataka state. After a final round of discussions, the workshop ended. All the proposals for both the states will be given a formal shape by the BNHS and a plan drawn up for final strategies and implementation, by integrating these sites with those chosen from the rest of the country. Ameen Ahmed, JN Prasad and Manu presented slide shows during the evenings.

At the Annual General Meeting (AGM) of the Society, held on 15.xi.1999 for the twelve-month period ended 31.iii.1999, the following persons were elected to the Executive Committee. Their term will be for a two-year period from the date of the election.

- Siraj A Taher, Walter Sanjeev Rao, N G Reddy, Aasheesh Pittie, K Bharadwaj, N Sunil Kumar, Rajeev Mathew, Hashim Tyabji, Sushil Kapadia and Y Malini.

Noticing that the Society's Income & Expenditure account showed a negative balance, members spontaneously donated a sum of Rs 2,700/- at the AGM and hoped that the Society would enter the new accounting year with a healthy balance sheet. Towards this end, donations from members are welcome!

Members who want to purchase WWF-India products may please contact Siraj Taher (phone: 3352607). Purhcases through the BSAP earns commission for the Society!

Due to obvious reasons of space, we could not carry our monthly columns. They will resume from January 2000.

Wishing all of you a Merry Christmas and a New Year full of wonderful birding!

LETTER FROM AN INSECT-HUNTING ORNITHOLOGIST—32

"It must always be borne in mind that no linear arrangement of Orders and families could possibly express satisfactorily the lines of descent and inter-relationships of birds, even were these certainly known; any system of classification based on the supposed course of evolution must inevitably depend largely on intelligent guesswork, and only a very bold optimist would claim that finality had been reached in deciding on the least objectionable arrangement.

"Discrepancies in scientfic names are mainly in those of genera. These are so much matters of individual opinion that it is rare to find any two works (even by the same author), on any particular avifauna, using identical sets of scientific names! This instability of scientific nomenclature is very puzzling to the lay reader, and is universally admitted to be a great hindrance to real progress in our knowledge of birds; but as no general agreement on the names to be used seems to be in sight, one must make the best use of it. A little practice in the art of—shall we say 'intuition'—generally enables one to discover the identity of a bird in literature in spite of its numerous scientific aliases."

[G.M. Henry, 1955, A Guide to the Birds of Ceylon, pp. xiv-xv]

"A perusal of several recent articles in the *Journal* has induced me to write on a matter of considerable importance to the study of Ornithology. We are face to face with a danger which has arisen in most countries but at the moment is particularly evident in India. I refer to the indiscriminate use of subspecific or racial names.

"When I arrived in India and started to work on Indian birds, my constant guide, companion and friend was found within the covers of the four volumes of Blanford and Oates, which we now term the *Old Fauna*. My case was the same as dozens of others. We turned to the *Fauna* for each new bird that we met with. We accepted its dicta with complete and justified confidence. We catalogued and inscribed our eggs and skins with the serial number of the species in the *Fauna*. We corresponded with each other according to the names and numbers of the *Fauna*. Occasionally with triumph we hailed a small discovery of some fact which was 'not in the *Fauna*' and we immediately wrote to the *Journal* about it. The result was that we in India attained for a time the millenium of all good Zoologists—uniformity of Nomenclature.

"With the New *Fauna* all this has changed. The unit is the subspecies and the subspecies is a far narrower compartment or pigeon-hole into which to fit one's observations. Take the case of the Common Grey Tit for instance. In the *Old Fauna* we were provided with one species which we called *Parus atriceps* [*P. major* now—K.G.]. It was easy to recognize in the cabinet and in the field. There was nothing like it in India. Seen in Kashmir or the Nilgiris is was immediately recognizable-beyond all doubt if the view was clear and the observer competent-and immediately one's notes could be placed confidently in their appropriate division without a care for minor differences which our Fauna had stated, were negligible.

"Now it is far different. The *New Fauna* has given 5 sub-divisions of our old division, for India proper alone. For each of those sub-divisions, that is races, it has given a diagnosis and a distribution. The Indian Ornithologist is immediately proceeding to behave in the face of these five races as he behaved with the old *Parus atriceps*. He is a little bothered by the fact that he has five pigeon-holes instead of one and reading the differences between the races he finds them hard to visualize and perhaps to fit in with his actual specimens. But he duly decides (with an eye on the distribution) that his bird is probably of such and such a race and in due course proceeds to chronicle it as such. The result is that in many of the recent numbers of the *Journal* many racial identifications appear which are certainly wrong and far more that are probably so.

"To recapitulate briefly, the state of our knowledge renders it very unsafe to identify the race of any Indian bird by guesswork from a perusal of the *Fauna*. The fact that our knowledge of the distribution of Indian birds and their races is incomplete; the fact that races are often recognized only with skilled knowledge and comparison; the fact that on migration, birds wander into the territories of other races of the same species;-these facts all combine to render guesswork and deduction very liable to error. That being so, one must ask the question what is the value of subspecific identifications made without satisfactory reasons. There is only one answer and that is *none*. And I go further and assert that every identification of this type is worse than useless; it is definitely harmful for it not only may lead us into a morass of error, throwing suspicion on good and bad alike, and will take a generation or more to put our knowledge straight again."

[Hugh Whistler, 1931, "An Open Letter to the Editors", *J.B.N.H.S.*, 35: 189-191, 193]

"I would be willing to discuss with you the utility of DNA—DNA hybridization but this is not the technique I (or most researchers using molecular characters to infer phylogenies) use. I use homologous DNA sequences and cladistic and distance analyses. With regard to a 'near perfect phylogeny' my opinion is that one can never know the 'true' phylogeny but using 'good', phylogenetically informative characters one can infer 'A' phylogeny (or an estimate of the true phylogeny) and use this phylogenetic tree to examine character evolution including morphological, behavioural, ecological, embryological, etc."

[Paul T. Smith, *in litt.*, 9.viii.1999]

Quite with a perspicacious sense of relief, and of satisfaction, am I offering this final part of my synoptic analysis of the birds of the Indian region (*sensu* Ripley's OLD SYNOPSIS *et seq.*, hence minus Burma, which I believe is incorrect biogeographically). A revised systematic inventory is also presented here for easy referral by, and of benefit to, amateur bird watchers. The alterations suggested by Sibley & Monroe and now being adopted by European ornithologists (I believe rather prematurely) have been mentioned, wherever important, in the last 10 Letters (# 22-31) of mine dealing with our bird taxa (*Pitta* # 94-103, February-November 1999).

What are visibly recognizable as "sparrow-like" birds are universally thought to be the most 'highly evolved' of all feathered animals. However, some authorities still treat the Corvidae or 'crow-like" birds as most advanced, just like there is yet no agreement on what are the most primitive avians in our land—Divers ('Loons') or Megapodes ('Scrubfowl'). English names I have used have been those mostly familiar to us, since I remain convinced that the changes advocated recently by 'Western' writers can only confuse and confound and are certainly not worth the trouble. Scientific names however, have largely been updated with reference to the ANNOTATED CHECKLIST by

Inskipp, Lindsey & Duckworth, since I accept the scientific basis for most of these changes. Again, I have raised several so-called "subspecies" to species status where these morphologically distinct populations are also allopatric and therefore reproductively isolated from their closest relatives, other "subspecies" of the same species. The definition of endemism has also been reviewed in the context of biogeographic (not political!) areas, and of centres of evolution. So, I distinguish 297 species autochthonous (peculiar) to our region, out of the 1,414 of them that I recognize, placed in 436 genera here. These are 121 more species than the 176 endemics Ripley listed in his OLD SYNOPSIS (pp. xix-xxiii). It is important for me to make it clear here that the taxonomy of our birds is still poorly known and much more detailed revisionary research work is needed by expert taxonomists, using all available databases, before we attain any stability. My own studies in recent years revealed that the species concepts of Eugene Oates & William Blanford (OLD FAUNA, 1889—1898) were far more 'natural' than the subspecies 'revolution' of Stuart Baker (NEW FAUNA, 1922—1930) and of Dillon Ripley (OLD & NEW SYNOPSIS, 1961 & 1982), or the current DNA-based re-classification of Sibley & Monroe (*ex* ANNOTATED CHECKLIST, 1996).

The family Passeridae were called "Ploceidae" by Ripley who included 3 subfamilies in it, but Sibley & Monroe also include the Motacillidae (Wagtails and Pipits) and Prunellidae (Hedge Sparrows) as two other subfamilies of Passeridae. The world fauna of the 3 subfamilies of Ripley number 157 species in 42 genera found all over the world except in Central America and 'Amazonia', Canada, Greenland and extreme northern Russia and the Pacific Ocean islands. The Indian region has 29 species of all 3 subfamilies, in 6 genera. Of the Passerinae (= Ploceidae, 8 Sparrows and 6 Snow Finches), we have 14 species in 3 genera (*Passer* Brisson, *Petronia* Kaup, *Montifringilla* Brehm), of which Blyth's Tree Sparrow (*Passer pyrrhonotus*) is endemic here. Of the Ploceinae or Weavers, we have 4 species of *Ploceus* Cuvier, of which Hume's and the Black-breasted Weavers (*P. megarhynchus*, *P. benghalensis*) are endemic. The Estrildinae comprise only of Munias here, 2 of *Amandava* Blyth and 9 of *Lonchura* Sykes, the following 5 being our endemics—Green Munia (*A. formosa*), and the Rufous-bellied, Vernay's, Ceylonese Hill, and Black-headed Munias (*L. jerdoni*, *L. vernayi*, *L. kelaarti*, *L. malacca*).

The Fringillidae of Ripley include 2 subfamilies, the Fringillinae (Chaffinch, Brambling), and the Carduelinae (Finches, Grosbeaks, Siskins, Linnet, Twite, Crossbill), which occur all over the world except in the arctic north, parts of the Sahara-Arabian deserts, in Madagascar and most of the Indo-Australian realm (some finches have been introduced in Australia, New Zealand and some islands in the Pacific Ocean), where 122 species are found (placed in 19 genera). Our region has 46 species in 16 genera, of which Fringillinae comprise just 2 species of *Fringilla* Linnaeus, and Carduelinae the other 44 species in 15 genera (*Coccothraustes* Brisson, *Mycerobas* Cabanis, *Carduelis* Brison, *Callacanthis* Bonaparte, *Serinus* Koch, *Leucosticte* Swainson, *Rhodopechys* Cabanis, *Rhodospiza* Sharpe, *Bucanetes* Cabanis, *Carpodacus* Kaup, *Loxia* Linnaeus, *Propyrrhula* Hodgson, *Haematospiza* Blyth, *Pyrrhoplectes* Hodgson, *Pyrrhula* Brisson), of which *Callacanthis* is endemic here. Of the Carduelinae, the following 5 species are our endemics—the Black-and-Yellow Grosbeak (*Mycerobas icterioides*), Red-browed Finch (*Callacanthis burtoni*), Pink-browed Rosefinch (*Carpodacus rodochrous*), and the Red-headed and Orange Bullfinches (*Pyrrhula erythrocephala*, *P. aurantiaca*).

The Emberizidae complete the tally of Indian region birds and are treated as a subfamily of the Fringillidae by Sibley & Monroe. The Emberizidae (*s. str.*) occur all over the world except in extreme deserts, polar areas, Madagascar, and the Indo-Australian realm. Some 567 species occur worldwide, placed in 146 genera, of which our area has 19 species, in 3 genera (*Miliaria* Brehm, *Emberiza* Linnaeus, *Melophus* Swainson), of which one, Blyth's Bunting (*Emberiza stewarti*) is our endemic.

In the revised inventory below, the number of genera and species that I recognize are given beside each taxon, in that order. The endemics of each are placed in parentheses. After each family, the numbers (#) in square brackets are the SYNOPSIS numbers of the included species and subspecies of this category, given here for ease of identification and reference.

THE ORDERS, FAMILIES, GENERA, SPECIES AND ENDEMICS OF THE CLASS AVES IN THE INDIAN REGION

[STRUTHIONIFORMES (fossil)]	1 (0)	1(0)
Struthionidae (fossil)	1 (0)	1(0)
GAVIIFORMES	1 (0)	2 (0)
Gaviidae [# 1-2]	1 (0)	2 (0)
PODICIPEDIFORMES	2 (0)	5 (0)
Podicipedidae [# 3-5]	2 (0)	5 (0)
PROCELLARIIFORMES	10 (0)	17 (0)
Procellariidae [# 6-13d]	6 (0)	12 (0)
Hydrobatidae [# 14-16a]	4 (0)	5 (0)
PELECANIFORMES	6 (0)	17 (1)
Phaethontidae [# 17-19]	1 (0)	3 (0)
Pelecanidae [# 20-22]	1 (0)	3 (0)
Sulidae [# 23-25]	1 (0)	3 (0)
Phalacrocoracidae [# 26-29]	2 (0)	5 (1)
Fregatidae [# 30-32]	1 (0)	3 (0)
CICONIIFORMES	22 (0)	36 (2)
Ardeidae [# 33-59]	12 (0)	21 (1)
Ciconiidae [# 60-68]	5 (0)	9 (0)
Threskiornithidae [# 69-72]	4 (0)	4 (1)
Phoenicopteridae [# 73-74]	1 (0)	2 (0)
ANSERIFORMES	19 (1)	43 (1)
Anatidae [# 75-123]	19 (1)	43 (1)
FALCONIFORMES	25 (0)	78 (10)
Accipitridae [# 124-203]	23 (0)	61 (8)
Falconidae [# 204-224]	2 (0)	17 (2)
GALLIFORMES	26 (4)	51 (25)
Megapodiidae [# 225-226]	1 (0)	1 (0)
Phasianidae [# 227-312]	25 (4)	50 (25)
GRUIFORMES	19 (1)	33 (4)
Turnicidae [# 313-319]	1 (0)	3 (0)
Gruidae [# 320-326]	1 (0)	6 (0)
Rallidae [# 327-250]	10 (0)	17 (1)
Heliornithidae [# 351]	1 (0)	1 (0)
Otididae [# 352-357]	6 (1)	6 (3)
CHARADRIIFORMES	41 (0)	118 (5)
Jaçanidae [# 358-359]	2 (0)	2 (0)
Haematopodidae [# 360-361]	1 (0)	1 (0)
Charadriidae [# 362-428]	19 (0)	60 (3)
Rostratulidae [# 429]	1 (0)	1 (0)
Recurvirostridae [# 430-432]	2 (0)	2 (0)
Ibidorhynchidae [# 433]	1 (0)	1 (0)
Dromadidae [# 434]	1 (0)	1 (0)
Burhinidae [# 435-438]	2 (0)	3 (0)
Glareolidae [# 439-444]	3 (0)	6 (2)
Stercorariidae [# 445-448a]	2 (0)	5 (0)
Laridae [# 449-484]	7 (0)	36 (0)
COLUMBIFORMES	9 (0)	44 (10)

Pteroclididae [# 485-492]	2 (0)	9 (1)
Columbidae [# 493-544b]	7 (0)	35 (9)
PSITTACIFORMES	2 (0)	15 (7)
Psittacidae [# 545-568]	2 (0)	15 (7)
CUCULIFORMES	9 (0)	24 (7)
Cuculidae [# 569-605]	9 (0)	24 (7)
STRIGIFORMES	13 (1)	35 (9)
Strigidae [# 606-665]	13 (1)	35 (9)
CAPRIMULGIFORMES	3 (0)	11 (3)
Podargidae [# 666-667]	1 (0)	2 (1)
Caprimulgidae [# 668-682]	2 (0)	9 (2)
APODIFORMES	7 (0)	19 (4)
Apodidae [# 683-709]	7 (0)	19 (4)
TROGONIFORMES	1 (0)	3 (1)
Trogonidae [# 710-716]	1 (0)	3 (1)
CORACIIFORMES	16 (1)	33 (5)
Alcedinidae [# 717-743]	6 (0)	13 (0)
Meropidae [# 744-753]	2 (0)	6 (0)
Coraciidae [# 754-762]	2 (0)	3 (0)
Upupidae [# 763-766]	1 (0)	1 (0)
Bucerotidae [# 767-776]	5 (1)	10 (5)
PICIFORMES	16 (0)	50 (18)
Capitonidae [# 777-792]	1 (0)	11 (5)
Indicatoridae [# 793-795]	1 (0)	1 (1)
Picidae [# 796-863]	14 (0)	38 (12)
PASSERIFORMES	189 (8)	780 (185)
Eurylaimidae [# 864-865]	2 (0)	2 (0)
Pittidae [# 866-871]	1 (0)	5 (1)
Alaudidae [# 872-909]	9 (0)	24 (8)
Hirundinidae [# 910-932]	3 (0)	17 (3)
Laniidae [# 933-951]	1 (0)	14 (1)
Oriolidae [# 952-961]	1 (0)	5 (0)
Dicruridae [# 962-981]	1 (0)	11 (3)
Artamidae [# 982-983]	1 (0)	2 (0)
Sturnidae [# 984-1019]	6 (1)	21 (8)
Corvidae [# 1020-1061]	10 (0)	28 (6)
Bombycillidae [# 1062-1063]	2 (0)	2 (0)
Campephagidae [# 1064-1096]	5 (0)	17 (3)
Irenidae [# 1097-1110]	3 (0)	6 (1)
Pycnonotidae [# 1111-1151]	7 (0)	23 (10)
Muscicapidae [# 1152-1768]	90 (6)	396 (101)
Troglodytidae [# 1769-1771]	1 (0)	1 (0)
Cinclidae [# 1772-1776]	1 (0)	2 (0)
Prunellidae [# 1777-1778]	1 (0)	9 (0)
Paridae [# 1789-1823]	6 (0)	25 (9)
Sittidae [# 1824-1841]	3 (0)	11 (3)
Certhiidae [# 1842-1851]	1 (0)	4 (1)
Motacillidae [# 1852-1891]	3 (0)	31 (3)
Dicaeidae [# 1892-1905]	1 (0)	11 (4)
Nectariniidae [# 1906-1932]	4 (0)	17 (5)
Zosteropidae [# 1933-1937]	1 (0)	2 (1)
Passeridae [# 1938-1978a]	6 (0)	29 (8)
Fringillidae [# 1979-2040]	16 (1)	46 (5)
Emberizidae [# 2041-2060]	3 (0)	19 (1)

NON-PASSERIFORMES: Orders = 19 [+ 1], Families = 51 [+ 1], Subfamilies = 7, Genera = 247 (8 endemic), Species = 634 (112)
PASSERIFORMES: Order = 1, Families = 28, Subfamilies = 20, Genera = 189 (8), Species = 780 (185)
AVES OF INDIAN REGION: Orders = 20 [+ 1], Families = 79 [+ 1], Subfamilies = 27, Genera = 436 (16), Species = 1,414 (297)

Addenda: **Letter # 31**—Page 4, Text para 1, Line 4 should have a closing parenthesis after "Illiger"; and para 4 ending should continue with the following text:

"The Nectarinidae is a typical 'Afro-Oriental' family (except most of the Sahara—Arabian deserts and north-easternmost China, Hainan and Formosa), extending from Africa and Madagascar and the Indian Ocean islands to New Guinea, the Solomon Islands and the extreme north of the Cape York penisnula of northern Australia. These are appropriately named "Sunbirds" as they are predominantly tropical, sun-loving species, visiting flowers for sustenance and also partaking of fruit, insects and spiders to supplement their nectarine diet. The Indian region has 15 resident species of Sunbirds (*Anthreptes* Swainson, *Nectarinia* Illiger, and *Aethopyga* Cabanis), of which 5 are endemic here—the Purple-rumped, Sykes' and Loten's Sunbirds (*Nectarinia zeylonica*, *N. minima*, *N. lotenia*), the Sahyadris and Hume's Sunbirds (*Aethopyga vigorsii* and *A. nicobarica*). There are also 2 species of Spiderhunters in the genus *Arachnothera* Temminck".

— **Dr Kumar Ghorpadé**, 1861 Bethel Street, Bangalore 560 043 & e-mail: varanus.kg@mailcity.com

BIRD-*WORD*: A BIRDWATCHER'S LEXICON Source: Peter Weaver's Birdwatcher's Dictionary © 1981 by Peter Weaver.

Atrophy Reduction in size of an organ as a result of lack of use. In the course of evolution, for example, the legs and feet of swifts (family Apodidae) have become atrophied as their lifestyle has become more aerial.

Attendance The time spent by breeding birds at the nest or colony. There is a pattern of attendance through the day, such patterns being of particular interest in cases where the birds feed at some distance from the nest, as with some types of seabird.

Auricular Of the ear.

Australasian (Region) *See* zoogeographical region. [One of the six geographical divisions of the world devised for the study of the distribution of land animals, also called 'faunal regions'. They consist of the palearctic, the Nearctic (North America), the Neotropical (South America), the Afrotropical (formerly 'Ethiopean') (Africa south of the Sahara), the Oriental (Asia south of the Himalayas) and the Australasian (Australia, New Zealand and nearby islands). Antarctica forms an additional region.]

Autecology *See* ecology. [The study of the relationships between the living organism and all aspects of its environment. If the ecological relationships involving a single species or group are being treated, the study is called 'autecology'. If a complete ecosystem is being studied, it is called 'synecology'.]

Autolycism Use of the opportunities provided by the activities of another animal, without the bird becoming a parasite or developing a commensal relationship. Examples include birds using buildings for nesting, or feeding on soil animals in an arable field, in both cases making use of human activities.

Axilla The 'arm-pit' of a bird, where the underwing joins the body. The feathers of this region are called the 'axillaries', and in a few species their colour can be an aid to identification, for example, black in the case of the Grey Plover Pluvialis squatarola.

Axillary (feather) *See* axilla.

Honorary Secretary's Report presented at the Annual General Meeting of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh, held on 15-11-1999—for the year ended 31-3-1999

Ladies and Gentlemen: Good Evening!

It gives me great pleasure to present you with a report of the happenings in your Society for the year ended 31st March 1999.

The Society's total membership stood at 262. The break up is as follows: Life Members 131 (38 new during the year), Ordinary 113 (81 new), Student 16 (15 new), Corporate 1, NRI 1.

During the year, members made field trips to the following 16 sites: Anantgiri Hills, Nehru Zoological Park, Chilkur Deer Park, Kasu Brahmananda Reddy National Park (where Suhel Quader demonstrated the art of bird banding to members), Andhra Pradesh Police Academy, Dundigal Airforce Academy, Narsapur Reserve Forest, Shamirpet Lake, Dindi Reservoir, Uma Maheshwaram, Palmakole Tank, Pocharam Tank, Ibrahimpatnam Tank, Bibinagar Tank, ICRISAT Asia Center and Manjira Barrage.

The following programmes were held at the indoor meetings of the Society:

1. Talk and slide show on tiger by Mr Hashim Tyabji.
2. Exhibition of wildlife paintings by Mr Sachin Jaltare and Mr Shrikant Wamanrao Kolhe and, talk on 'Falcons and Falconry' by Mr Hyder Jaffer.
3. Talk by Mr Humayun Taher on 'Birds of Zimbabwe.'
4. Talk and slide show by Mr Pranay Waghray of Nallamalai Foundation, on the 'Wildlife of Andhra Pradesh.'
5. Talk by Mr S. Ashok Kumar on 'A safari to Kenya.'
6. Video film on 'Jurong Bird Park, Singapore.'
7. Talk and slide show on 'Kolleru Lake' by Mr Siraj A. Taher and Mr Aasheesh Pittie.

The Society was the beneficiary of a generous gift of slides from Mr Hashim Tyabji.

Mr Siraj A. Taher and Mr Humayun Taher made the Society proud by winning Silver and Bronze medals respectively at the 9th Andhra Pradesh Philatelic Exhibition (APPEX-99) held in Hyderabad from 12-15 February 1999. Their exhibits were entitled "Study of birds" and "Birds of prey", respectively.

On 31-1-1999 we published the 12th volume of *Mayura* as a special issue containing the proceedings of the Decennial Seminar (1980-1990) on "The role of birds in the environment and their conservation", that the Society had organized. This bumper issue, running into 163 pages is indexed on species and places. It was received very well in the birding circles of the country. Mr Sachin Jaltare did some commendable sketches for this volume and we are indebted to him for his commitment and generosity. Work on volume 13 of *Mayura* is in progress.

Twelve issues of *Pitta* (# 84-95) were published during the year. The four-page newsletter was 'upgraded' to a six-page newsletter from January 1999 (# 93) onwards. Dr Kumar Ghorpadé's Letters were featured regularly and I would like to thank him personally and on behalf of the Society, for choosing *Pitta* as a vehicle for his extremely informative and comprehensive Letters on the Ornithology of the subcontinent.

In November 1998, the Society commenced a project that studied the bird fauna of 'protected areas' and municipal gardens in Hyderabad and its surrounds. This is to be a year-long project and is coordinated by Mr K.C. Ramakrishna. Members volunteered enthusiastically and survey work proceeded smoothly. A report will be published at the end of the 12-month period.

Ladies and Gentlemen, the work of a Society like ours is fuelled by the strength of many elbows. I feel privileged to thank each and every one of you who have contributed in building up the BSAP. There are some that need special mention.

- The principal, management and staff of Vidyaranya High School have given us a roof for our indoor meetings and I thank them for their cooperation and generosity.
- Mr Suhel Quader for conducting, on behalf of the Society, a wonderful series of audio-visual presentations for students of the 7th standard in Vidyaranya, on the natural wonderland that is India.
- It is said that a picture is worth a thousand words. Ample proof of this adage is sprinkled in the various issues of *Pitta*. We are fortunate to have two good artists amidst us, Mr Jaltare and Mr Shrikant W. Kolhe, and all should thank them for their enlivening art.
- We thank Mr Heinz Lainer for having kindly agreed to referee records from Goa, for the *Birding Notes* column in *Pitta*.
- We thank Mr Qamar Mohammed Khan DFO WL, Medak District, for arranging transport for members to visit Manjira Barrage.
- We also thank Mr T Ramakrishna CCF WL & Chief Wildlife Warden of A.P. Forest Department and his team for their cooperation and forthright help whenever we require it.

As we enter the new millenium, we face a world beleaguered with human greed and the ephemeral concepts of instantaneous gratification. To most, no cost is too great to achieve this and our environment bears the full brunt of such policies. It is up to us and, other groups like ours, to safeguard the environment for birds cannot exist if their habitats are pillaged. Let us be alert at all times and yet not lose the sensitivity that enables us to appreciate the beauty and relevance of the world around us. Thank you!

BIRDWATCHERS' SOCIETY OF ANDHRA PRADESH
P.O. BOX 45, BANJARA HILLS POST OFFICE, HYDERABAD 500034

BALANCE SHEET AS AT 31-3-1999

LIABILITIES		Amount Rs.	ASSETS		Amount Rs.
Capital Fund:		101,281.50	Cash at Bank:		56,400.41
Opening Balance	59,781.50		HDFC Bank	56,400.41	
Life Membership	41,500.00		Fixed Assets:		7.00
			Binoculars (4)	4.00	
Aasheesh Pittie		2000.00	Slide Projector (1)	1.00	
Audit Fees		500.00	Telescope (1)	1.00	
			Tripod (1)	1.00	
			Cash on hand		647.95
			Fixed Deposit – HDFC		30,000.00
			Closing Stock (Brochures)		3,432.00
			Excess of expenditure over income:		13,294.14
			Current Year	16,699.39	
			Less Reserves	3,405.25	
		103,781.50			103,781.50

NOTES TO THE ACCOUNTS

1. The Society is accounting its Income & Expenditure on cash basis.
2. Life Membership of Rs. 41,500.00, received during theyear, has been transferred to Capital Fund, as per the Society's Memorandum.
3. Fixed Assets received as donations by Society have been assigned nominal value of Re. 1.00 each taken into account.
4. An expense of Rs. 5,250.00 for printing of new brochures of the Society is being written off over a period of three years from 1998-99 to 2000-2001. The balance amount of Rs. 3,432.00 is being shown as closing stock of brochures.

INCOME AND EXPENDITURE ACCOUNT FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31-3-1999

EXPENDITURE		Amount Rs.	INCOME		Amount Rs.
Printing & Stationery:		27,257.00	Subscriptions:		14,620.00
Stationery, *etc.*	6,042.00		Corporate	2,000.00	
Brochures	1,818.00		Ordinary	11,405.00	
Printing – Pitta	7,043.00		Student	585.00	
Printing-Mayura	12,354.00		NRI	630.00	
			Other Income:		12,464.91
Bank Charges		848.00	Admission Fees	2,330.00	
Postage Charges		8,375.00	Bank Interest	4,656.91	
Miscellaneous Expenses		1,479.50	Donations	3,500.00	
Books & Periodicals		1,352.80	Sales—CBH	150.00	
Conveyance		1,572.00	Sales—Others	465.00	
Stipend		1,200.00	Stickers	1,303.00	
Trunks		1,200.00	Mayura	60.00	
Audit Fees		500.00			
			Excess of expenditure over income		16,699.39
		43,784.30			43,784.30

Sd/-	Sd/-	Sd/-	For Sunil & Sanjay
Siraj A. Taher	Aasheesh Pittie	K. Bharadwaj	Chartered Accountants
President	Honorary Secretary	Honorary Treasurer	Sd/-
			Sunil Kumar Jain
			Partner

BIRDING NOTES Compiled by Aasheesh Pittie

This column publishes birding notes in brief telegraphic form, from **Andhra Pradesh, Goa, Haryana, Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra, Punjab, Rajasthan & Tamil Nadu** on interesting and significant sightings and behaviour like breeding, feeding, migration, nesting, *etc*. Notes on flowering and fruiting trees and their relationship with birds are also welcome. English names and classification follow, S.D. Ripley's *A Synopsis of the Birds of India and Pakistan* (1982, 2nd ed.) and scientific nomenclature, T. Inskipp, N. Lindsey & W. Duckworth's *An Annotated Checklist of the Birds of the Oriental Region* (1996). Unless specified, all observations are for 1999. Abbreviations, Contributors, Notes, Regional Referees, *etc*., are at the end. For selection of breeding criteria 'Probable, Possible, Confirmed', see *Pitta* # 82, February 1998, p. 4.

ANDHRA PRADESH

MAHBUBNAGAR DISTRICT 28.xi (HT,SJ)
Umamaheshwaram[1]
CRESTED HAWK-EAGLE 1; LARGE GREEN BARBET 6; BLACKHEADED ORIOLE 1; WHITEBELLIED DRONGO 3; YELLOWTHROATED BULBUL 2; SPOTTED BABBLER 1; VERDITER FLYCATCHER 3; YELLOWCHEEKED TIT 1; WHITE-EYE.

NALGONDA DISTRICT 28.xi (HT,SJ)
Dindi Reservoir
OPENBILL STORK 75+; BLACK IBIS 8; FLAMINGO 3; MARSH HARRIER 1; WOOD SANDPIPER 15+; COMMON SANDPIPER 20; BLACKWINGED STILT 60+; BLACKHEADED GULL 3; INDIAN RIVER TERN 40+.

RANGAREDDI DISTRICT 5.xii (HJ,HJ,HT)
Mamidipalli
SCAVENGER VULTURE 4 ad., 2 imm.
Nadergul
PAINTED STORK 53; WHITE-EYED BUZZARD; WHITEBACKED VULTURE 50 on pylons near poultry farm; BONELLI'S EAGLE; BOOTED HAWK-EAGLE 1 dark phase & 1 light phase; HEN HARRIER 1M; MONTAGU'S HARRIER 2 F; SHORT-TOED EAGLE POB, 1 N seen but no activity; KESTREL 12. 5 trapped, ringed (BNHS rings) & released. 1 ringed on 28.xi.1998 recaptured & released; INDIAN CUCKOO; SMALL GREENBILLED MALKOHA; SHORT-EARED OWL; GREY WAGTAIL; BAYA CB.

GOA

NORTH GOA DISTRICT
Bondla Wildlife Sanctuary 29.x (HL)
CRESTED GOSHAWK 1; CUCKOO 2; SMALL CUCKOO 1; MALABAR TROGON 1F; CHESTNUT-HEADED BEE-EATER 3; BLUE-BEARDED BEE-EATER 1; BLUE-HEADED ROCK THRUSH 1F.
Mandovi River, Inland Estuary of (HL)
13.ix: COLLARED PRATINCOLE 2; BLACK TERN 1 juv.
17.ix: EASTERN LITTLE STINT 1; LITTLE STINT 164+; DUNLIN 3; CURLEW-SANDPIPER 80+; BROAD-BILLED SANDPIPER 35+; WHITE-WINGED BLACK TERN 2ad., 3 juv.; INDIAN RIVER TERN 1.
26.ix: EUROPEAN ROLLER 1 juv.
17.x: LESSER ADJUTANT 1.
Seabird Watch, Anjuna 18.xi: (HL)
WHITE-WINGED TERN 29; BROWN-WINGED TERN 10; SOOTY TERN 1 ad.

ABBREVIATIONS: Ab-abundant; ad-adult/s; br-breeding; C-common/ly; CB-confirmed breeding; const-construction/ing; *c*.-approximately; disp-display/ing; F-female; flt-flight; fly-family; freq-frequent/ly; hrd-heard; id-identify/ied; imm-immature; inc-include/ing; Is-Island; juv-juvenile; LM-local migrant; M-male; mat-material; N-nest/ing/s; POB-possible breeding; PRB-probable breeding, plm-plumage; RF-Reserve Forest; Resp-respectively; Tlk-Taluk; vil-village; WL-wildlife; yng-young.
CONTRIBUTORS: H Lainer (HL); H Taher (HT); S Jaltare (SJ).
NOTES: [1] Erroneously mentioned under Nalgonda District in *Pitta* # 103 p. 1.
REGIONAL REFEREES: Andhra Pradesh: Aasheesh Pittie; Goa: Heinz Lainer; Haryana: Harkirat S. Sangha; Karnataka: J.N. Prasad; Kerala: P.O. Nameer; Maharashtra: Nitin Jamdar; Punjab: H.S. Sangha; Rajasthan: H.S. Sangha; Tamil Nadu: V. Santharam.

NOTES & NEWS

Calendar of Events

September-December 1999: 1st Sunday of every month: BSAP's Gardens & Semi-wilderness Area Surveys. The project continues for another 6 months. Fortnightly surveys reduced to monthly. Further details from K.C. Ramakrishna (3751652) / H.Taher (3352607).

BNHS Programmes (Complete details from BNHS 022-2821811. Camps only for members of BNHS, nature-walks & talks open to all):

[Annual Nature Camps for 1999-2000:
South India: Rangannathittu, Kabini River, Nagarhole, Top Slip, Parambikulam & Mukurti NP. Non-refundable registration of Rs500/- on 4.ix.1999 (*Late news, but try your luck*!). 2 16-day batches of 23 each. **1.xii-16.xii.1999:** 1st batch. **18.xii-2.i.2000:** 2nd batch.
North India: Kishanpur Wildlife Sanctuary & Dudhwa National Park. Non-refundable registration of Rs500/- on 13.xi.1999. 2 6-day batches of 23 each. **20-25.ii.2000:** 1st batch. **27.ii-4.iii.2000:** 2nd batch.
[BNHS Bird Banding Training Programme for 1999-2000 season: **26.xi-5.xii:** Assam (site to be selected). **22.xii-31.xii:** Point Calimere (TN). **10.ii-5.iii.2000:** Andamans. **20.iii-29.iii.2000:** Point Calimere (TN). **31.iii-9.iv.2000:** Tirupati (AP).

23.ix.2000—1.x.2000, Nepal: International Symposium on Galliformes. Info., from Prof. A.H. Musavi, Secretary, W.P.A. India, 6 Kabeer Colony, Anoop Shahar Road, Aligarh 202002.

For Private Circulation Only

For information, write to: Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh, PO Box 45, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad 500034, India.
Editors: Aasheesh Pittie (3350683) & Siraj A Taher (3352607) **E-mail**: AASHEESH@HD1.VSNL.NET.IN
Membership (Rs): Admission=20; Ordinary=100, Student=25 per annum; Life=1,000. *Outstation cheques not accepted.*

2.2.200

PITTA

Bulletin of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh No 105-106: Jan-Feb 2000

PROGRAMME

Indexed / 13-2-2001

FIELD OUTING: 13-ii-2000: ICRISAT Asia Center, Patancheru, Medak District: Members are requested to reach the destination by 7.30 am and assemble at the main gate. Transportation within the campus will be arranged. Lunch will be provided on to-pay basis. This will be a full-day trip.

MEETING: 21-ii-2000, 6 p.m.: Talk on Bird Associations by S. Ashok Kumar. Vidyaranya High School, Opp., Secretariat, Saifabad, Hyderabad.

NOTES & NEWS

WASH2000

The Wildlife Art Show—WASH2000 - organized by the Society, was a resounding success. 77 works of 27 artists were on display at the ICCR Art Gallery from 14-17 January 2000. Padmashri Jadgish Mittal, noted art collector, inaugurated the show along with Mr Mito Beach, Director of Art, Smithsonian Institution. WASH2000 had many wellwishers and we would like to especially thank some who played a key role in its success. Mrs Leslie Jacob, Regional Director, ICCR, for whole-heartedly supporting the idea from day one. Ms Atiya Amjad, who did a great job despite constraints of time, curated the show. Mrs Amita Talwar, Editor *Channel 6*, for publicizing the event by giving us the cover of her monthly city magazine. Mr Ambareesh Pittie for generously printing invitations for the show.

The artists who displayed their work were: Sudha Madhusudan, M.A. Ranganayaki and Shuba Sridhar (Bangalore); Pratibha Pandey (Delhi); Sajid Bin Amar, Shahnaz Arni, K. Srinivasa Chari, Sachin S. Jaltare, Kalpana Kapadia, Mohd. Misbahuddin Khan, Binoy Koley, Srikant Wamanrao Kolhe, Srikant Kurva, Ambadas Mahurkar, Maitreyee, S. Laxmana Murthy, S. Ramachandra Murthy, K. Paramasivam, Krishna Reddy, Sarkar, Shailender, Sirajuddin, L.M.V. Srinivas, K.D. Sudhir, Stanley Suresh, Farhad Tamkanat and Fawad Tamkanat (Hyderabad).

The role of the English and Telugu media, printed as well as visual, was exemplary and WASH2000 received wide coverage due to their support. This ensured a constant stream of visitors to the gallery. We had a full house many times. Schools took the opportunity to send students to view the works. Some comments of visitors are given below.

- "As lovers of wild life we are very impressed by the exhibition." —*Col. Shantanu Ray.*
- "This is my first ever show visited. My thought is I missed a lot in my life till now."—*Anonymous.*
- "The paintings are as lovely as original birds. Imaginative and reproductive skills of the artists are highly commendable. I congratulate the 'WASH' for conducting such valuable exhibition." *C. Narayana Reddy, MP.*
- "A marvellous effort! Good to know we have so much interest in our wild life and birds. They need protection and respect—badly. Keep up the god work!! Best wishes." *Amala Akkineni, Anita Talwar & Meera Shenoy.*
- "The works of Sachin Jaltare are very refreshing. I hope this exhibition encourages many more wild life lovers." —*Kalpana Reddy.*
- "A most interesting display in different mediums. Wish we get an opportunity to see many more such exhibitions in the near future." —*Col. N.M. Rasquinha & Wg Cdr C.C. Cariappa.*.
- "The paintings are really worth seeing. They have really inspired me." —*Supriya Menon, 14 years.*
- "I enjoyed the exhibition and was impressed by the standards. I purchased 3 paintings and would have taken two more had they not been previously sold. Looking forward to the next time." — *Rod Gait.*
- "The exhibition was long due. All accolades to the organisers for getting the talented artists and their works under one roof. It is really an ideal way of getting the general public interested in wild life—and more important—in its preservation! Congratulations and best of luck!—*Wg Cdr Syed Iqbal Ali (Retd).*
- "The tigers looked so real I just hope I don't get nightmares tonight and when I take a glance at the pictures I think about how wonderful nature is." —*Ambika, class vi, Vidyaranya.*
- "According to me it was artistic, *karishmatic* and eye-catching. Excellent. *Varun, class vii, Vidyaranya.*
- "A great step towards wild life promotion amongst the masses. All the art works speak for themselves. All the best! —*Priti Mahajan.*
- "A good change from the usual art shows, a welcome effort of bringing wildlife and art together." —*Aditi Prakash.*
- "It was a pleasure visiting the art exhibition. I was truly amazed by the talent of the artists. At a time when we

should value our vanishing habitats, an exhibition of this kind certainly does wonders in bringing the beauty of birds to the general population. Thank you very much." — *Rajnesh Domalpalli*.

Kolleru Waterbird Sanctuary

Siraj A. Taher

Kolleru Lake is not only the largest freshwater lake in India, but has always been and still continues to be a haven for birds, both resident and migratory. At one time this wetland and its surrounding areas were the only known breeding grounds of the Spotbilled Pelican *Pelecanus philippensis*. Kolleru was also known for its great wealth in natural fish and an important centre for duck farming. Ever since a concerted effort to develop pisciculture in the area was started in 1975, so many changes have taken place in this vast and complex ecosystem, that the "Pelicanry" completely disappeared around the 70's and the huge population of migratory birds has been greatly reduced and the lake reduced in area. Considering the importance of Kolleru as an international wetland and the largest known breeding colony of the Spotbilled Pelican in India, the Govt of Andhra Pradesh, in 1963, declared the Kolleru Lake within a radius of 20 miles from the pelicanry as a protected area. Inspite of this token protection, the degradation of the area continued and has slowly choked up the lake. After more than 30 years of deliberations, considerations and after overcoming several hurdles, the Govt of Andhra Pradesh has at last acted and declared the whole of the Kolleru Lake area up to 5+ contour msl as Kolleru Wildlife Sanctuary vide Gazette notification # 407 dated 5th October 1999, with immediate effect. Out of a total lake area of 95,000 Ha at maximum flooding (10.7+ msl), an area of only 30,855 Ha (5+ msl) has been declared as a Sanctuary. Some of the salient features of this notification are:

- Fishing will be allowed with traditional methods only and motorized boats should not be used, even for movement of people and goods.
- Encroachments of *patta* lands in some areas to be evicted.
- Licenses to construct fish tanks cancelled and no new license for pisciculture tanks will be issued.
- Use of pesticides and chemicals for agriculture prohibited within the sanctuary area.

It is hoped that this notification of the Govt of Andhra Pradesh will provide necessary means for all the concerned authorities in the region to sincerely implement the order.

In the U.S., the number of people who took trips from home specifically to watch birds has skyrocketed since 1980. Consider these facts: sixty-three million people in the United States watch and feed wild birds each year. That is one out of every 3 adults! A1990 survey by Fortune magazine showed that twice as many vacationers preferred to watch birds than play golf. Birdwatching is most prevalent between the ages of 30 and 70. Still, 1 in 5 adults between ages 16 and 29 say they watch birds. Birdwatching is one of America's favorite forms of outdoor recreation baseball notwithstanding! In fact, far more adults (16 years of age and older) in the United States birdwatch than play baseball. [From: "Shyamal" muscicapa@mailandnews.com on: bngbirds@onelist.com]

Information is being gathered for a project on the past and present distributions and status of the **Long-billed Vulture** ***Gyps indicus*** and ***G. tenuirostris***. It is now abundantly clear from study of morphology that these are two highly distinct species, and it seems likely that both are now threatened to some extent.

Unfortunately, it is also clear that vulture identification in India has long been problematic, and that a paucity of substantiated reports exist for either taxon. Both have been confused not only with each other, but also extensively and chronically with Eurasian Griffon and immature White-backed Vulture. Owing to the faulty identification materials prevailing until recently, we can accept only records that can be substantiated either by notes on identification taken at the time of observation, photographs, specimens, etc. If you have or know of such documented records for either form of Long-billed Vulture, we would very much appreciate hearing from you. Any usable contributions will be duly acknowledged.

No offense is meant to those whose records, which we recognize may frequently be correct, are not accepted due to lack of documentation.

Please contact, Pamela C. Rasmussen, at: rasmussen.pamela@nmnh.si.edu, and send photographs to me at: Division of Birds, NHB E607 MRC 116, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D. C. 20560 USA.

Population declines of vultures in India attributed to a disease factor

The preponderance of evidence indicates that a disease factor, presumed to be a virus, is responsible for the mortalities and population declines of the white-backed vulture and the long-billed vulture in India. The liver and other internal organs of two birds found dead or dying were covered with whitish crystals assumed to be uric acid, deposits of which cause gout in humans. In the absence of any evidence of survival of afflicted birds, extinction of both species now appears to be a possibility. Prudence therefore dictates that the disease hypothesis be accepted as a working assumption in order to minimize whenever possible further dissemination of any disease factor and its transmission to other species, including transmission to people. Particularly because of the recent identification in the USA of a virus of African origin that has produced deaths both of people and of wild birds, every effort at this time should be made on an emergency basis to identify and characterize any virus or other disease factor detected in the tissues of affected birds. Without provoking any undue alarm, public health authorities both in India and in other countries should be alerted to the probability that a new disease factor has appeared in the environment. Since any appearance of a 'new' virus or of any disease agent, most likely transmitted from another species, must be considered as a potential international problem, an international effort is called for to identify and characterize whatever is currently decimating vulture populations in India. [Robert W. Risebrough: pelecanus@igc.org]

105-106

A Bird Lover in China Tries Rehabilitating an Old Enemy

Gazing out into the faint winter light, Zheng Guangmei spots one of his favorite sights: a tiny brown sparrow, hopping along the snowy path beneath his apartment window.

Sparrows are among the most common birds in the world, and once could be found across China. But about 40 years ago, they became victims of a bizarre political campaign that labeled them a class enemy and led to their systematic extermination. That, combined with break-neck industrialization, has left huge swaths of China barren of the hardy bird.

Rehabilitating the humble sparrow has become the life's work of Mr. Zheng, a 67-year-old bird-watcher with a quiet voice and a broad smile. His work is his penance for failing to defend the bird; as he recalls his complicity, a frown comes over him and his eyes begin to water.

In 1958, Mr. Zheng (pronounced JUNG), a newly hatched ornithologist, started working with Soviet experts sent to bolster China's rudimentary university system. His first lesson was to give up the Chinese practice of shooting the birds to study them; instead, he learned to observe birds in the wild, taking careful notes about their markings, behavior and environment.

While Mr. Zheng's career took off, China's fortunes plummeted. The Communist Party launched a disastrous program of crash industrialization that led to famine and the deaths of as many as 30 million people. Deciding to remake China's ecology, the party vowed to rid China of sparrows. The spurious science of Marxism had deemed sparrows "harmful birds," since they ate grain and thus were inimical to the peasant-based utopia the Communists wanted to build.

In a massive campaign that lasted just three days, the party mobilized millions of Chinese to parade through cities, villages and fields, beating drums and setting off fireworks. Too nervous to perch, the sparrows fell exhausted to the ground, where they were bludgeoned. Birdbaths were laced with toxic chemicals and feeders filled with rat poison. Bird carcasses littered China's streets.

Ornithologists like Mr. Zheng were pressed into service. Top officials decided that their underlings had to prove they had met their kill quota by bringing in bundles of bird legs. So Mr. Zheng sat in a room counting claws and writing reports.

Most of the legs belonged to sparrows, but Mr. Zheng's trained eyes noticed that huge numbers of other birds had been killed as well, including woodpeckers, swallows, egrets, ducks and swans. "We thought the party knew what it was doing and so we helped kill the sparrows, millions of them," Mr. Zheng says.

With the skies strangely silent, the party declared its fowl purge a success. Mr. Zheng, though, was shattered by the experience and returned home vowing to make amends.

His first act was to fight for the sparrows' rehabilitation. The Communists had based their campaign on a turgid pamphlet called "Outline of Agricultural Development," which listed sparrows as one of four rural "pests," along with locusts, rats and mosquitoes. Mr. Zheng wrote a memo to the agriculture bureau with a startlingly revisionist view, arguing that in the birds' absence insects had multiplied. A year later, the bureau agreed to replace the sparrow on its hate list with the hapless bedbug.

Over the next decade, as the sparrow population started to recover, Mr. Zheng figured he had won his war. He used his free time to study sparrows and wrote the first article in Chinese on the bird's habitat and behavior. But the sparrow is in danger once again, this time from the mix of prosperity and lawlessness that have accompanied the past 20 years of economic reform. Farmers are now allowed to plant what they want, leading to a burst of agricultural production, but pesticides such as DDT are used freely. The result: Sparrows, which do like to eat modest amounts of grain along with insects, have been eradicated from several provinces, including Fujian and Anhui.

Other hazards abound. Deforestation has eliminated natural habitats, and rising living standards have allowed people to indulge in delicacies such as grilled sparrow. Sanctuaries have turned into hunting grounds, as poachers bribe officials to look the other way. In the Chongming Island bird reserve outside Shanghai, half the 200 species of birds have been wiped out by poachers during the past decade, with 50,000 birds -- many of them sparrows -- killed each year, according to local officials.

"The sparrow should have rebounded since the 1950s, but it hasn't," Mr. Zheng says as he leafs through a book of his lovingly rendered sparrow sketches. "Tree sparrows, mountain sparrows, black-breasted sparrows, even house sparrows -- all are in trouble."

And so, Mr. Zheng continues his fight in the unlikeliest of causes, working out of his small apartment on a Beijing university campus. Inspired by photos of sparrows hung on the white-washed concrete walls of his living room, Mr. Zheng has become a modern-day activist, using the Internet and e-mail to set up the 600-member China Ornithological Society. His followers, including graduate students he advises, document and crusade against the use of DDT in China, which has been officially banned.

Mr. Zheng's volunteers have also alerted China's increasingly assertive media about illegal bird markets, where rare species are sold to restaurants that serve exotic animals to nouveaux riches. And he's bringing the 23rd International Ornithological Congress to Beijing in 2002, a meeting he hopes will raise awareness among officials and help make wildlife protection a national priority.

Besides sparrows, Mr. Zheng also monitors 182 endangered bird species. His heart, though, still aches for the most common of birds. "If they can't survive here," he says, "what can?" [Ian Johnson in *The Wall Street Journal*]

OBITUARY—Bertram E. Smythies

I have just received the sad news of the death of Bertram E. Smythies. He died on 29th June at the age of 87, at his home in Redhill outside London. Recently "Bill" Smythies struck up a friendship with Frederique Gely Ozaki in Delhi. His letters were a constant source of amazement to us and I am sure there are many members of the Natural History network who will be interested in his story.

"Bill" Smythies was the author of one of my most treasured possessions - 'The Birds of Burma'. This classic study of Southeast Asian birds was first published in Rangoon in 1940. A second edition was published in London in 1953 and a third, revised, edition - which has larger, better

reproduced, plates - in 1986. The book was also reprinted in Dehradun, India, in 1984. At the time of his death, Bill Smythies was working on the final revisions to the 4th edition of 'The Birds of Burma'. He also wrote 'Birds of Borneo' (three editions), 'Common Sarawak Trees' (1965), 'Flowers of South-West Europe' (a field guide with Oleg Polunin, and line drawings by his wife Jill Smythies, 1973), and 'Flowers of Greece'.

In a letter to my friend earlier this year, he wrote about the origins of the illustrations for 'The Birds of Burma': "The paintings for my book belonged to H.C. Smith, Chief Forest Officer who organized the book and commissioned the artist. When Burma was evacuated in March 1942, his wife was an evacuee from Shwebo airfield, and took with her the original paintings wrapped up in a bundle as part of her baggage allowance of 10 kilos. Now 60 years on another edition (no.4) is being prepared from those same original paintings." Smythies added that "Commander A.M. Hughes, the artist who painted the birds for my book, started his work as a bird artist in Hong Kong (where he drew naval charts) for the Hong Kong Naturalist. Then he was transferred to Rangoon and we seized on him."

Bill Smythies' grandfather came out to India to join the Indian Forest Service in 1873 and served until 1902, mostly in and around Dehra Dun. His father took degrees in Forestry and Geology at Oxford and joined the Indian Forest Service in 1908, serving until 1940 in the then "United Provinces". He was based at Naini Tal, where Bill Smythies was born in 1912. In another letter Smythies wrote that he "started hill trekking at the age of six months, camping in tents in the hills of Kumaon...A cow was towed along from camp to camp to provide the necessary milk, later replaced by a nanny goat...Brought up within sight of Nanda Devi and Trisul, who could fail to have a love of mountains and natural history?"

When Smythies' father retired in 1940, he "accepted a post on contract as Forest Advisor to the Maharaja of Nepal", and lived in Kathmandu with his mother until 1947. "At that time the country was closed to Europeans, only those employed by the Maharaja being allowed in: the British Minister and his Secretary with their wives, the Electrical Engineer (whose job it was to keep the aerial ropeway running) and his wife, and my parents - total 8. Not even Gurkha officers were allowed. Access was by rail to Raxaul then bus to Bhimphedi, followed by 17 miles on foot or pony over the Chandragiri pass; no road, only a 6-foot path." Smythies was given permission to visit his parents and "(most unusually) to accompany a Nepalese forest officer on a trek to the Ganja La, at nearly 19,000'... via Gosainkund Lake. He was after Tahr, and I wanted to see the birds of high altitude. None of the Europeans in the valley were allowed out of the valley as a rule. Despite the heavy rain (it was September), it was a memorable trip."

Smythies joined the Burma Forest Service in 1934. With a passion for botany and ornithology, he explored the remote mountain regions of Burma, often accompanied by his Kachin guide and friend Sumdu Mai and following in the footsteps of his "hero", British botanist and explorer Kingdon-Ward. During the war he was posted to Fort Hertz in northern Burma, and was in charge of the Myitkyina district under the Military Administration ("the Japanese Army never considered it worth while to advance north of Sumprabum"). Smythies was made redundant - along with other European government officers -- when Burma attained independence in January 1948. In January 1949, Smythies was appointed to the Colonial Forest Service in Sarawak where he spent the next fifteen years. He spoke fluent Burmese, Jinghpaw, Malay, and Iban and in his letters writes warmly of his friendship with the Kachins in Burma and the Ibans of Sarawak.

At the age of 52 - and on the day of his departure from Sarawak in 1964 - Smythies married the beautiful Florence Mary Smythies. "Jill", as she was known, was a talented botanical artist whose career was cut short by an accident to her right hand. For the next fifteen years they lived in Spain from where they explored the Sierras, the mountains of Britain, the Pyrenees (his favourite) and the Alps, before moving to England, where Jill died five years ago. They had no children.

In 1986, in honour of his wife, Smythies established the annual Jill Smythies Prize through The Linnean Society of London. The prize is "for published illustration, such as drawings or painting, in aid of plant identification, with the emphasis on botanical accuracy and the accurate portrayal of diagnostic characteristics. Illustrations of cultivars of garden origin are not eligible". The Linnean Society, which was founded in 1788, is now the oldest extant scientific society in the world devoted to natural history.

In his last letter, Smythies said "so I am now on my own...at the age of nearly 87, my legs tell me they have had enough."

I am sure you will join us in mourning the passing of Bill Smythies.

[Belinda Wright blue@vsnl.com with Frederique Gely Ozaki, in: Natural History of South Asia-General discussion and research nathistory-india@lists.Princeton.EDU]

Calendar of Events

BNHS Programmes (Complete details from BNHS 022-2821811. Camps only for members of BNHS, nature-walks & talks open to all):

Annual Nature Camps for 2000:

North India: Kishanpur Wildlife Sanctuary & Dudhwa National Park. 2, 6-day batches of 23 each. **20-25.ii.2000:** 1st batch. **27.ii-4.iii.2000:** 2nd batch.

BNHS Bird Banding Training Programme for 2000 season: **10.ii-5.iii.2000:** Andamans. **20.iii-29.iii.2000:** Point Calimere (TN). **31.iii-9.iv.2000:** Tirupati (AP).

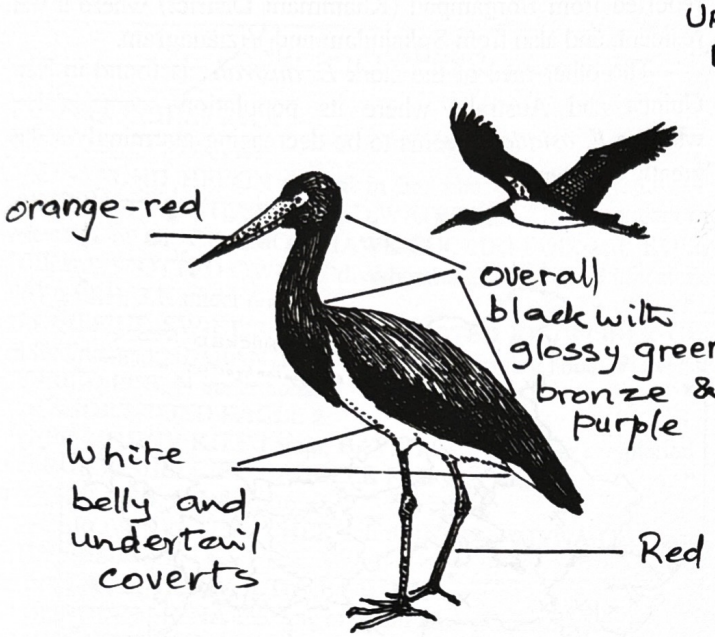
23.ix.2000—1.x.2000, Nepal: International Symposium on Galliformes. Info., from Prof. A.H. Musavi, Secretary, W.P.A. India, 6 Kabeer Colony, Anoop Shahar Road, Aligarh 202002.

23-29.x.2000, Kandy, Sri Lanka: PASOC 2000, Second Pan Asian Ornithological Congress. Contact address: The Congress Secretariat, CDC Conventions (Pvt) Ltd., 87/4 Dudley Senanayake Mawatha, Colombo 08, Sri Lanka. Application forms available with Hon. Secretary, BSAP.

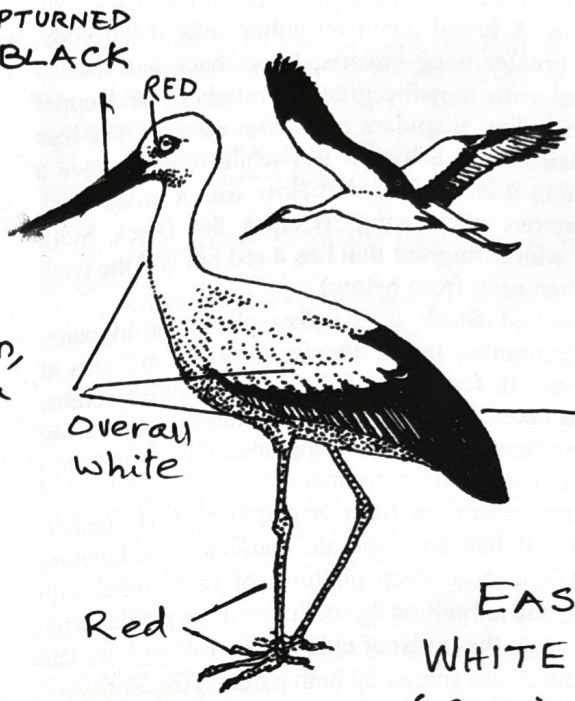
25-28.ix.2001, Australian Ornithological Conference: hosted by Charles Sturt University in Bathurst, NSW. Website: http://clio.mit.csu.edu.au/aoc2001. For details contact Dr Andrew M. Fisher at afisher@csu.edu.au.

FIELD CRAFT *By* Siraj Taher & Sachin Jaltare

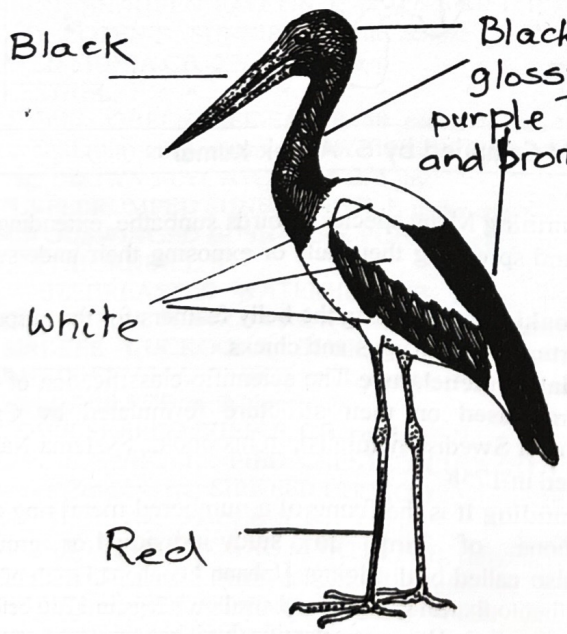
STORKS (Family: Ciconidae) are longlegged diurnal and chiefly terrestrial birds. Their main habitats and feeding grounds are marshes, cultivated fields, lakes, rivers and water bodies. They are mainly black and white with metallic sheen of purple, green and bronze with long and large pointed bills, broad wings and short tails. They fly with their necks stretched out and also soar and glide on thermals high up in the sky.



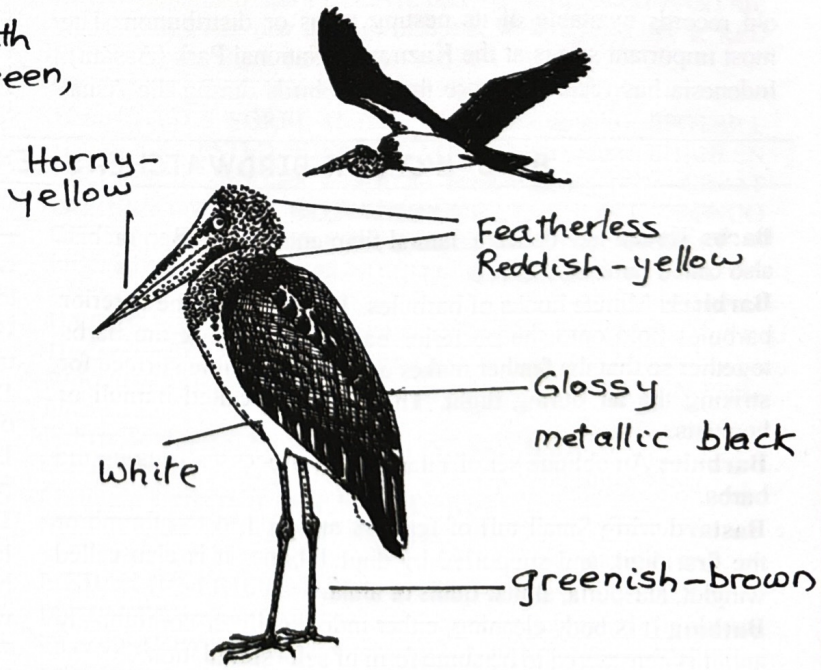
BLACK STORK



EASTERN WHITE STORK
(Ciconia ciconia boyciana)



BLACKNECKED STORK



LESSER ADJUTANT

SPOTLIGHT: Blacknecked Stork *Ephippiorhynchus asiaticus* By Siraj A. Taher

This column focuses on birds that are in the Red Data Book of BirdLife International as threatened / highly threatened species. Readers are requested to send information about these birds to the Society.

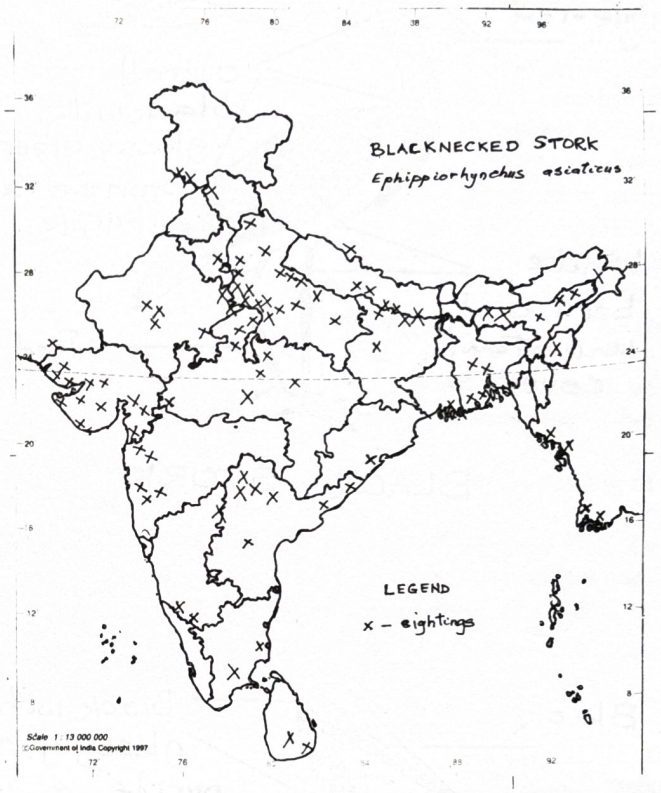
The Blacknecked Stork is a large bird with a massive black beak. Its head and neck are black, glossed with bluish-green, purple and bronze. A broad patch on either side of the body, the primary and greater wing coverts, lower back and the tail are black, glossed with metallic green. Underbody and upper back are white including scapulars and lesser coverts. The legs are coral-red. Males have a brown iris while females have a yellow one. In flight it is white from below with a broad black diagonal band across each wing. (Contra the Black Stork *Ciconia nigra*, a winter migrant that has a red bill and the wing are fully black when seen from below).

The Blacknecked Stork is usually solitary or in pairs, feeding along riverbanks, tanks, *jheels*, marshes and also at salt-water lagoons. It feeds on fish, frogs, reptiles, crabs, molluscs, *etc*. On take-off, it flaps its wings heavily and slowly and after attaining height, it glides along smoothly. Sometimes it also soars and circles aloft on thermals.

The breeding season is from September to December. Like other storks, it has an elaborate courtship ritual before pairing. Its nest is a large deep platform of twigs lined with grass and leaves, and is built on top of "peepul" or similar large trees near water or in the midst of cultivation. 3-4 eggs are laid and incubated (duties are shared by both parents) for 30 days.

The typical race is found in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Indonesia and Thailand. In India it is generally distributed in suitable areas as a resident species, seen more in the north than in the south. Though widely distributed, nowhere is it common or abundant. Nor are many old records available of its nesting areas or distribution. The most important site is at the Kaziranga National Park (Assam). Indonesia has recorded more than 350 birds during the Asian Waterfowl Census. From Andhra Pradesh they have been reported from Borgampad (Khammam District) where it was resident, and also from Srikakulam and Vizianagram.

The other race of the stork *E. australis* is found in New Guinea and Australia where its population seems stable, whereas *E. asiaticus* seems to be decreasing alarmingly and is greatly threatened.



BIRD-*WORD*: A BIRDWATCHER'S LEXICON Compiled by S. Ashok Kumar

Barbs Thread-like delicate, lateral filaments attached to rachis, also called rami.

Barbicels Minute hooks of barbules. The hooks on the anterior barbules hold onto the posterior barbules and lock the barbs together so that the feather makes a firm but flexible surface for striking the air during flight. They are also called hamuli or hooklets.

Barbules An oblique set of Filamentous processes fringing the barbs.

Bastard wing Small tuft of feathers attached to the thumb or the first digit, and supported by digit 1 bone. It is also called winglet, alaspuria, allular quills or alula.

Bathing It is body cleaning, either individually or communally and it is considered to be some form of self- stimulation.

—**Dew Bathing** In dew deposited on leaves.

—**Dust Bathing** Several gallinaceous birds such as chicken, partridges, pheasants, quails splash dust of sand over their wings and feathers to dislodge ectoparasites and thus maintain feathers.

—**Sunbathing** Many species of birds sunbathe, extending their wings and spreading their tails or exposing their undersurface to heat.

Belly-soaking It is wetting the belly feathers for the purpose of transporting water to eggs and chicks.

Binomial nomenclature The scientific classification of living organism based on their structure formulated by Carolus Linnaeus, a Swedish naturalist, in his book, 'Systema Naturae' published in 1758.

Bird banding It is the fixing of a numbered metal ring on the tarsus bone of birds to study individual or groups of birds, also called bird ringing. [Johann Leonhard Friseh of Berlin was the first to fix real string around swallow's legs in 1740 before the autumn migration. However scientific bird banding was started by Christian Mortensen in Denmark.In our country bird ringing was started by the Maharaja of Dhar in M.P. in 1926. Object of banding is (1) to trace the movement of birds, flyways, distribution ranges, (2) to know the life span of individuals within a species (3) to gather information regarding animal life cycles, moult and (4) to determine the population breeding success. Since the metal rings get corroded by bird's acidic excrement leading to inflammation and gangrene of bird's feet, plastic rings are now used in Germany.]

BIRDING NOTES Compiled by Aasheesh Pittie

This column publishes birding notes in brief telegraphic form, from **Andhra Pradesh, Goa, Haryana, Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra, Punjab, Rajasthan & Tamil Nadu** on interesting and significant sightings and behaviour like breeding, feeding, migration, nesting, *etc*. Notes on flowering and fruiting trees and their relationship with birds are also welcome. English names and classification follow, S.D. Ripley's *A Synopsis of the Birds of India and Pakistan* (1982, 2nd ed.) and scientific nomenclature, T. Inskipp, N. Lindsey & W. Duckworth's *An Annotated Checklist of the Birds of the Oriental Region* (1996). Unless specified, all observations are for 2000. Abbreviations, Contributors, Notes, Regional Referees, *etc*., are at the end. For selection of breeding criteria 'Probable, Possible, Confirmed', see *Pitta* # 82, February 1998, p. 4.

ANDHRA PRADESH

CHITTOOR DISTRICT

Rishi Valley 1999 (VS)

24-25.v: POND HERON several in br., plm; CRESTED HONEY BUZZARD 1; WHITEBREASTED WATERHEN CB, 1 yng, dark in colour, ¾ of ad; COMMON HAWK-CUCKOO POB, hrd; KOEL POB, hrd; SPOTTED OWLET 'dive-bombing' at a Bonnet Macaque; BAYA PRB, 3 N under const.

27.v: ALPINE SWIFT 3; WHITEBREASTED KINGFISHER CB, ad feeding yng; INDIAN ROBIN CB, ad carrying food; PURPLE SUNBIRD PRB, N under const.

31.v: SHORT-TOED EAGLE 2.

4.vi: BRAHMINY KITE 1 imm; BAYA PRB, N nearing completion.

8.vi: RUFOUSBELLIED BABBLER PRB with N-mat.

13.vi: IORA CB, 1 fledgeling.

16.vi: BROWN FLYCATCHER 1 hrd; INDIAN MYNA CB, 1 yng at N in *Peltophorum* sp. Tree.

19.vi: SCAVENGER VULTURE CB, 1 juv.

21.vi: INDIAN MYNA CB, yng at N in *Ficus religiosa* tree.

23.vi: CRESTED HONEY BUZZARD 3.

26.vi: SIRKEER CUCKOO 2.

3.vii: IORA PRB 1 M disp; MAGPIE-ROBIN POB, hrd; ASHY PRINIA POB, in br plm; BLACKHEADED MUNIA 6.

4-5.vii: BROWN FLYCATCHER hrd.

8.vii: COPPERSMITH PRB, excavating hole.

17.vii: PARIAH KITE 70+ overhead, some with moulting tails; TAWNY EAGLE 2 ad., 1 juv.; SCAVENGER VULTURE 2 yng; KESTREL 1; SHAHEEN FALCON 1; PALM SWIFT 1; ALPINE SWIFT 5; LOTEN'S SUNBIRD M in eclipse plm; WHITE-THROATED MUNIA CB, 2 N on *Acacia* sp.

24.vii: KESTREL.

26.vii: SMALL GREEN BEE-EATER 50 gather to roost. Some without central (pin) tail feathers; REDWHISKERED BULBUL CB, N with yng; BROWN FLYCATCHER CB, 1 juv.

27.vii: PURPLERUMPED SUNBIRD PRB, N under const.

29.vii: RUFOUSWINGED BUSH-LARK POB, actively displaying.

30.vii: GREY HORNBILL 1.

31.vii: WHITEBREASTED WATERHEN CB, 2 juv., with ad.; GREY HORNBILL 1; JUNGLE CROW CB, ad., feeding yng.

1.viii: SIRKEER CUCKOO 2; DUSKY CRAG MARTIN 1; REDRUMPED SWALLOW PRB, pair const., N under culvert; SPOTTED MUNIA PRB, with N-mat.

5.viii: REDWHISKERED BULBUL CB, yng leave N.

8.viii: ALPINE SWIFT 15; PIED CRESTED CUCKOO 1 eating caterpillars on *Zizyphus* sp.; SIRKEER CUCKOO 1.

10.viii: WHITEBROWED BULBUL CB, 1 yng.

13.viii: BESRA 1; DUSKY CRAG MARTIN PRB, carrying wet mud from puddle; FRANKLIN'S PRINIA POB, in br., plm.

21.viii: BESRA 1; BRAHMINY KITE 1; PIED CRESTED CUCKOO 2; BLACK DRONGO 1 in tail moult; LOTEN'S SUNBIRD 1 ad., in br., plm, another in eclipse!; Following birds were seen feeding on winged termites: BESRA, REDWHISKERED BULBUL, COPPERSMITH, MAGPIE-ROBIN, WHITEBREASTED KINGFISHER, SMALL GREEN BEE-EATER, BROWN FLYCATCHER, TAILORBIRD, HOUSE CROW, JUNGLE CROW, WHITEHEADED BABBLER, INDIAN ROBIN, WHTIEBROWED BULBUL, REDVENTED BULBUL, PURPLE-RUMPED SUNBIRD, LOTEN'S SUNBIRD.

22.viii: SPOTBILL DUCK 3; ALPINE SWIFT 2; BLACK DRONGO in tail moult.

28.viii: REDWATTLED LAPWING CB, 1 juv.; BLUETAILED BEE-EATER 6; GREY WAGTAIL 1; BAYA CB, 48 N, many half-built.

29.viii: PARADISE FLYCATCHER 1F; BLUETAILED BEE-EATER 3.

31.viii: PURPLERUMPED SUNBIRD CB, 1chick in N.

5.ix: SPOTTED DOVE PRB disp.; KOEL CB, yng begging from House Crow; BROWN FLYCATCHER 1; GREENISH LEAF WARBLER 3; PURPLE SUNBIRD 1 M in eclipse plm.

11.ix: COMMON SWALLOW 1; GREENISH LEAF WARBLER 3.

12.ix: LESSER WHITETHROAT 1.

17.ix: TAWNY EAGLE PRB N; BLACK DRONGO CB, 3 juv.; INDIAN ROBIN CB, 4 M juv.; GREY WAGTAIL 1.

18.ix: POND HERON non-br plm; LITTLE EGRET POB 2 in br., plm; SPOTTED MUNIA CB, 1 N on a transformer; BLACKHEAD-ED MUNIA 8.

19.ix: FOREST WAGTAIL 2 hrd; SPOTTED MUNIA PRB, with N-mat. BLACKHEADED MUNIA PRB, with N-mat.

21-23.ix: GREENISH LEAF WARBLER C; FOREST WAGTAIL 4-5.

29.ix: PITTA 6 hrd.

1.x: BLUETAILED BEE-EATER hrd.

3.x: TAWNY EAGLE 1 juv; SMALL CUCKOO 1; BLUETAILED BEE-EATER hrd; HOOPOE hrd; PITTA 1; GREY DRONGO 1; BROWNBRREASTED FLYCATCHER 1; STREAKED FANTAIL WARBLER PRB, pair mating; LESSER WHITETHROAT 2; RED MUNIA a pair; BLACKHEADED MUNIA CB, 2 juv.

9.x: BLUETAILED BEE-EATER 8; FOREST WAGTAIL 4.

10.x: CATTLE EGRET 15 (seen after a few months); SPOTBILL DUCK 5; CRESTED HONEY BUZZARD 1 dark phase; SHAHEEN FALCON 1; SIRKEER CUCKOO POB, courting pair?; GREAT HORNED OWL hrd; BROWN SHRIKE 1 juv; BLACK DRONGO CB, 2 fly parties with 2-3 juv; PARADISE FLYCATCHER CB, 1 juv & ad., pair; PURPLE SUNBIRD M in eclipse plm.

HYDERABAD DISTRICT

Hyderabad City 21.xi.99 (JNP)

PARIAH KITE PRB, carrying twigs; BLUE ROCK PIGEON PRB, birds mating.

Nehru Zoological Park 20.xi.99 (JNP,SK,KKM)

COOT CB ad., with 3 juv.; HOUSE CROW carrying away a frog.

Osmania University 18.xi.99 (JNP/SK)

SPOTTED OWLET CB, ad., with juv.

MEDAK DISTRICT

ICRISAT Campus (SQ)

28.ix.99: COOT CB 4 pairs with 4, 4, 1 & 2 fledglings; PURPLE MOORHEN CB ad with 1 chick; PEAFOWL CB 3 F with 4, 3, & 1 chicks.

2.x.99: SHOVELLER *c*.140.

13.x.99: PAINTED STORK 3 ad, 1 imm; SPOONBILL 1; SPOTBILL 42; KESTREL 1; BLACKWINGED STILT *c*. 30.

21.xi.99 (AP,SQ,JNP,SK,MBK): BARHEADED GOOSE 1; LESSER WHISTLING TEAL 52; BRAHMINY DUCK 51; COMB

DUCK 6; BLACKWINGED KITE PRB, carrying N-mat.; COOT CB, ad., with yng; BLACKTAILED GODWIT 14; SPOTTED DOVE PRB, mating, ASHY SWALLOW-SHRIKE feeding on Plain Tiger twice; ROSY PASTOR 40+; GREYHEADED YELLOW WAGTAIL feeding on Water Boatman.

NELLORE DISTRICT

Nelapattu Wildlife Sanctuary 27.xi.99 (MC,MNS)[1]
OPENBILL STORK CB, 150 pairs nesting.

Pulicat Wildlife Sanctuary 27-28.xi.99 (MC,MNS)[1]
FLAMINGO 40,000; PAINTED STORK 75.

RANGAREDDI DISTRICT

Ibrahimpatnam Tank 19.xii.99 (AP)
PAINTED STORK 48; WHITE STORK 2; REDHEADED MERLIN 1, SYKES' CRESTED LARK.

Kasu Brahmananda Reddy National Park 20.xi.99 (VS,SQ)
LARGE CORMORANT 2; WHITE-EYED BUZZARD 1 juv; CLIFF SWALLOW PRB, 12, courtship feeding & mating noticed; ROSY PASTOR 20; REDBREASTED FLYCATCHER 1; BOOTED WARBLER; PLAIN PRINIA CB, carrying food in beak; BLACK REDSTART F; PURPLE SUNBIRD M in eclipse plm; SPOTTED MUNIA CB, several juv.

KARNATAKA

BANGALORE DISTRICT

Bangalore City
21.ix.99: GREYHEADED MYNA 7? (SK).

J.P. Nagar
2.ix.99: BLYTH'S REED WARBLER hrd (MBK).

Lalbagh
28.x.99: BLUETHROATED FLYCATCHER (NRS).

Shankarapuram
1.xi.99: BLYTH'S REED WARBLER (MBK).

Shivanahalli
21.xi.99: JUNGLE BUSH-QUAIL CB, N with 6 white eggs (KN).

MYSORE DISTRICT

Mysore City
31.x.99: BLUE ROCK PIGEON POB, mating (JNP).

TUMKUR DISTRICT

Mydenahalli 25-27.xi.99 (SQ)
SHORT-TOED EAGLE; MARSH HARRIER; MONTAGU'S HARRIER; PALE HARRIER; KESTREL; ROSY PASTOR; BAYBACKED SHRIKE; BLYTH'S REED WARBLER; GREENISH WARBLER *Phylloscopus trochiloides*; LARGE CROWNED LEAF WARBLER *P. occipitalis*; RUFOUSFRONTED PRINIA; LESSER WHITETHROAT.

KERALA

ERNAKULAM DISTRICT

Chendamangalam 22-24.x.99: (VS)
BESRA 1; COMMON HAWK-CUCKOO hrd; CHESTNUTHEADED BEE-EATER; BLACKHEADED ORIOLE hrd; BRONZED DRONGO several.

Kochi (VS)
20.x.99: KOEL hrd.
21.x.99: BLUETAILED BEE-EATER 10.

PALGHAT DISTRICT

Bharatpuzha River near Ottapalam (VS)
18.x.99: WHITENECKED STORK 7; WHITE IBIS 13.

Parambikulam Wildlife Sanctuary (VS)
12-14.xi.99: LESSER ADJUTANT 1; RUFOUS BABBLER; SMALL SUNBIRD.

MAHARASHTRA

AHMADNAGAR DISTRICT

Rehkuri Sanctuary 14-21.x.99 (SQ, KI)
BLACKWINGED KITE: CB N with 3 yng about to fledge; MARSH HARRIER; KESTREL; INDIAN SANDGROUSE; PIED CRESTED CUCKOO; COMMON HAWK CUCKOO: CB 2 juv., each begging from a flock of Large Grey Babblers; EUROPEAN ROLLER; COMMON SWALLOW; ROSY PASTOR; BOOTED WARBLER; LESSER WHITETHROAT; GREENISH LEAF WARBLER *Phylloscopus trochiloides*; BLACK REDSTART: 1 M, 1 F; GREY TIT; TREE PIPIT *Anthus trivialis*.

SHOLAPUR DISTRICT

Nanaj Sanctuary 22.x-1.xi.99 (SQ, KI)
WHITE NECKED STORK; PALE HARRIER; MONTAGUE'S HARRIER; MARSH HARRIER; SHORT-TOED EAGLE; KESTREL; INDIAN SANDGROUSE; GREAT INDIAN BUSTARD: 4 regularly seen; GREEN SANDPIPER; INDIAN COURSER *c.* 30; EUROPEAN ROLLER; ROSY PASTOR; COMMON SWALLOW; BOOTED WARBLER; LESSER WHITETHROAT; GREENISH LEAF WARBLER *P. trochiloides*; STONE CHAT; GREY TIT; TAWNY PIPIT; BROWN ROCK PIPIT 1 sighting; YELLOW WAGTAIL; WHITE WAGTAIL; GREY-NECKED BUNTING.

TAMIL NADU

COIMBATORE DISTRICT

Top Slip 12-14.xi.99 (VS)
SHAHEEN FALCON 1; BLUEWINGED PARAKEET C, LORIKEET[2] large numbers; SCOPS OWL hrd; GREAT PIED HORNBILL hrd in Karian Shola; GREY DRONGO[2]; WHITEHEADED MYNA POB 2 juv., with Indian Mynas; GOLDFRONTED CHLOROPSIS[2]; PIED FLYCATCHER-SHRIKE pair; RUFOUS BABBLER; SMALL SUNBIRD at Karian Shola.

ABBREVIATIONS: Ab-abundant; ad-adult/s; br-breeding; C-common/ly; CB-confirmed breeding; const-construction/ing; *c.*-approximately; disp-display/ing; F-female; flt-flight; fly-family; freq-frequent/ly; hrd-heard; id-identify/ied; imm-immature; inc-include/ing; Is-Island; juv-juvenile; LM-local migrant; M-male; mat-material; N-nest/ing/s; POB-possible breeding; PRB-probable breeding; plm-plumage; RF-Reserve Forest; Resp-respectively; Tlk-Taluk; vil-village; WL-wildlife; yng-young.

CONTRIBUTORS: A Pittie (A); JN Prasad (JNP); K Manu (KM); Kavita Isvaran (KI); Krishna Narain (KN); M Chandrasekaran (MC); MB Krishna (MBK); Madras Naturalists' Society members (MNS); NR Swamy (NRS); S Karthikeyan (SK); S Quader (SQ); V. Santharam (VS);

NOTES: [1]MNS Bulletin Vol 21(12) December 1999. [2]Drinking *Eucalyptus* nectar.

REGIONAL REFEREES: Andhra Pradesh: Aasheesh Pittie; Goa: Heinz Lainer; Haryana: Harkirat S. Sangha; Karnataka: J.N. Prasad; Kerala: P.O. Nameer; Maharashtra: Nitin Jamdar; Punjab: H.S. Sangha; Rajasthan: H.S. Sangha; Tamil Nadu: V. Santharam.

For Private Circulation Only

For information, write to: Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh, PO Box 45, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad 500034, India.
Editors: Aasheesh Pittie (3350683) & Siraj A Taher (3352607) **E-mail**: AASHEESH@HD1.VSNL.NET.IN
Membership (Rs): Admission=20; Ordinary=100, Student=25 per annum; Life=1,000. *Outstation cheques not accepted.*
This issue is sponsored by Mr Humayun Taher.

PITTA

Bulletin of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh No 107: March 2000

PROGRAMME

FIELD OUTING: 12-iii-2000: Manjira Barrage, Medak District: Members are requested to reach the destination by 7.30 am and assemble at the Environment Education Centrer at Manjira. This will be a full-day trip. Please carry drinking water and lunch.
MEETING: 20-iii-2000, 6 p.m.: Film show. Vidyaranya High School, Opp., Secretariat, Saifabad, Hyderabad.

NOTES & NEWS

Happenings at the Society: Field Trip to ICRISAT Campus—13.ii.2000

Humayun Taher

The members who collected at the main gates of ICRISAT Campus in Patancheru on the morning of the 13th.
were all doubtless looking forward to a great day of birding bliss. Nor were they disappointed as after events were to prove.

To begin with, the weather gods were in a good mood and the fierce heat, which had been prevailing for the past few days, was in abeyance on this day. This set the seal on the rest of the day. Members started to come in by about 7.30 a.m. and the ICRISAT authorities had kindly provided a bus for all of us to tour the campus.

Becoming impatient at the delay in the start, Prasad and Humayun decided to walk up to the Campus Lake which is a couple of hundred yards from the main gate. On the way, we notched up a Kestrel sitting on a light pole and regarding us quizzically. Also we saw a couple of Indian Rollers and a pair of Tree Pies disporting in the air above the main building.

Arriving at the first of the lakes, we saw a good number of ducks in attendance. The majority of the raft consisted of Redcrested Pochards, but there was a sprinkling of Cotton and Bluewinged Teals, and Coots, to add variety to the scene. Looking up in the air, we spotted a Montagu's Harrier and a couple of Marsh Harriers sailing around and generally harrying the ducks on the water. On the second lake in the series we spotted a small raft of Gadwalls and some Spotbills. Also a Purple Heron, which although giving a remarkable display in the art of disguising itself as a reed stalk, was defeated at the hands of the two eager twitchers who focused him through binox and identified him without any trouble.

The rest of the group was now observed to approach and having decanted themselves from the bus, set up a chorus of OOH's and AAH's at the birds on the lake. Prasad and Humayun now proceeded to rejoin their clan and enjoy their company. Vinay came stalking over, informing us in a confidential undertone, that there were waders on the far shore of the lake. Telescopes were now produced and focused on these distant waders and identity was hotly debated and finally consensus was reached on Spotted and Common Sandpipers. Seema then apprised us to the presence of Nukta on the far shore of the lake and everyone peered through the telescopes at these interesting ducks.

Tea now made its appearance and soon everyone was happily munching biscuits. Meanwhile the birds continued to appear, starting with a Brown Shrike and going on through Indian Great Reed Warbler, Lesser Whistling Teal, Bonelli's Eagle and Bronzewinged Jacanas. Having finished tea, we now bethought ourselves to proceed to Patancheru Lake that lies just outside the perimeter of the Campus and has some interesting marshes and paddy fields bordering it, which are good for wading birds. Moorty was thrilled to hear this, because he, for some reason, is quite captivated by wading birds and is happiest when peering through a telescope at small brown birds on the edge of water bodies. We accordingly clambered into the bus and set off, passing on the way, a majestic Short-toed Eagle sitting regally on top of a telegraph pole and contemplating the bus with an imperious stare. Humayun, standing near the door of the bus made frantic signs to Vinay, who was ensconced in the back, to pass the camera but the great bird wasn't having any. It took off just as Humayun was lifting the camera prior to taking a photograph. We now pushed on to the next lake.

Arriving at the spot we poured out of the bus and started peering at the nearby paddy fields to see what waders, if any, were around. We spotted a couple of Spotted Sandpipers and a solitary Ruff, to the undisguised delight of our wader enthusiast. On the other side, there was more promise and a good flock of Blackwinged Stilts was seen along with a few Little Stints and some more Sandpipers of the Common variety. On the lake was a good raft of ducks that comprised mostly Spotbills, but mixed up in the flock were a few colourful Brahminy Ducks and a couple of diminutive Common Teals. Sushil then set up a shout that there were Blacknecked Storks on the shores. Considerably startled at this announcement everyone stared at the birds and found them to be White Ibises. The younger members found a Star Shelled Tortoise crawling along the path in the general direction of the lake much to the delight of the large clan of photographers in our midst. After recording the reptile for posterity we released it to continue its perambulations. Also discovered by the youngsters was the foot of some species of owl. The president spent an exhausting half-hour attempting to identify the creature and eventually

decided that the BNHS would have to be called in! Well satisfied with this lot, we now proceeded to ICRISAT Lake, which lies more or less in the center of the Campus.

This lake proved to be the most rewarding of the lot. Even before we disembarked from the bus, it was possible to see a good raft of birds on the lake. Estimates ranged from 5,000 to 10,000 birds. Delighted at this offering, the twitchers shouldered their binoculars, checked the scopes and set off to see what was on offer.

It was found that a majority of the birds here were Shovellers interspersed with a good number of Lesser Whistling Teals and some Pintails. By themselves floated a few Brahminy Ducks, which, mindful of their higher caste, remained distant from the rest of the hoi polloi! Vinay now appointed himself as leader of the troupe of enthusiastic youngsters and led them off to the shores of the lake to explain the intricacies of identifying ducks on the water. Moorty meanwhile, with a hopeful air, scanned the margins of the lake in search of his beloved waders and soon breathlessly announced the presence of a Blacktailed Godwit. Meanwhile the other scope was focused on a large raptor perched on the top of a bush on an island in the lake. Our earlier impression of the bird being a Marsh Harrier was soon revised as the bird gave all the appearance of being as removed from a Harrier as a wader is from a duck! It was identified as an Eagle of the *Aquila* clan, but which one? Soon however, the bird obliged us by taking wing and the white trailing edges of the wings and a white bar through the center of the upper-wing identified it as a Steppe Eagle. Our resident raptorphile, Humayun waxed enthusiastic on the properties of the noble bird until everyone was convinced that a world devoid of Steppe Eagles was not worth living in!

Aasheesh spotted a few Painted Storks soaring at a great height in the heavens and then announced that a walk along the bund of the lake might be rewarding. So we set off—passing a solitary Stone Chat on the way. There were a good number of birds on the far side of the lake and Aasheesh and a couple of other members went to investigate and found them to be Spoonbills. The youngsters meanwhile, under the able guidance of Vinay, had succeeded in finding the defunct remains of a duck, which, from the shape of the bill, appeared to have been a Shoveller. Moorty appeared, looking rather crestfallen and announced sadly that the lake was almost devoid of waders. Meanwhile Prasad spotted a Darter perched on a twig in the center of the lake with its long neck tucked in and presenting a suspiciously Cormorant-like appearance. However we soon saw through the hoax and the Darter sadly uncoiled its long snake-like neck and flew off!

Time was now getting on and the bus driver, who had been unceremoniously routed out of bed on a Sunday and pressed into driving a bus-full of lunatics about the premises started to think longingly of house and family. Respecting his unspoken wishes, we climbed into the bus and drove back to the main gate where the cars were. That concluded the trip and a most interesting one it was too. ICRISAT as usual had lived up to its reputation and provided us with a total of 79 species, some of them quite interesting ones too. All had a good time.

Why are birds important?

"The role of the canary in insuring the safety of early miners is well known—even if this knowledge is perhaps less than totally accurate. If the canary remained healthy, the air the miners breathed was safe. If the canary stopped singing (or breathing) it was time to head to the surface before the lethal gasses present had the same effect on the miners. It is not completely off the mark to see all birds as "canaries" in the "mine" that is our planet. The health of a species is, in part, the result of the health of the environment in which we find it. It isn't really the Spotted Owl which is the center of the controversy in the Northwest—the life and health of the owl is our way of measuring the life and health of the old-growth forest in which many, but not all, of this species are found.

"Why do we choose birds rather than, let us say, mammal, or fish, or insects as our measuring stick for the life of ecosystem? There are many times as many insects, mammals are more like us, and fish come in as beautiful and colorful an array as birds. I believe it is because birds are creatures that we see all the time. Most of us are unable to arrive at much of a conclusion about the health of our spherical home by our observation of mammals—we just don't see enough of them on regular basis. Insects have several strikes against them. Many are too small to be carefully observed and the value of their positive role in the web of life is a little hard to appreciate while they are raising welts on our skin. Those who are fortunate enough to have access to face-to-face views of the myriad of fish in our fresh and saltwater environments could use their health as the measuring device needed, but not all of us can. Birds are everywhere! We can appreciate them in all locations, at all times of the day or year. Those that migrate become part of our understanding of the rhythms of the season. What better group of animals, then, to be used as a health check on our home. **[Dick Beeler**: RBeeler333@aol.com, Cape Coral, FL. *On* BIRDCHAT@LISTSERV.ARIZONA.EDU]

Calendar of Events

BNHS Programmes (Complete details from BNHS 022-2821811. Camps only for members of BNHS, nature-walks & talks open to all):

Annual Nature Camps for 2000:

North India: Kishanpur Wildlife Sanctuary & Dudhwa National Park. 2, 6-day batches of 23 each. **20-25.ii.2000:** 1st batch. **27.ii-4.iii.2000:** 2nd batch.

BNHS Bird Banding Training Programme for 2000 season: **10.ii-5.iii.2000:** Andamans. **20.iii-29.iii.2000:** Point Calimere (TN). **31.iii-9.iv.2000:** Tirupati (AP).

23.ix.2000—1.x.2000, Nepal: International Symposium on Galliformes. Info., from Prof. A.H. Musavi, Secretary, W.P.A. India, 6 Kabeer Colony, Anoop Shahar Road, Aligarh 202002.

23-29.x.2000, Kandy, Sri Lanka: PASOC 2000, Second Pan Asian Ornithological Congress. Contact address: The Congress Secretariat, CDC Conventions (Pvt) Ltd., 87/4 Dudley Senanayake Mawatha, Colombo 08, Sri Lanka. Application forms available with Hon. Secretary, BSAP.

25-28.ix.2001, Australian Ornithological Conference: hosted by Charles Sturt University in Bathurst, NSW. Website: http://clio.mit.csu.edu.au/aoc2001. For details contact Dr Andrew M. Fisher at afisher@csu.edu.au.

LETTER FROM AN INSECT-HUNTING ORNITHOLOGIST—33

"The most productive source of alternative information is likely to be from molecular studies, such as ribosomal RNA or DNA sequence data (e.g. Martin & Pashley 1992). Arguably, sequence data derived from 'coding genes' might offer the best possibilities. However, initial hopes that DNA analysis would provide a clear and unequivocal solution to all systematic problems can now be seen as overoptimistic (Patterson et al. 1993). Molecular data are not intrinsically better: we should not rely on biochemistry alone, but look for consensus amongst results obtained from molecular and morphological data sets, or amalgamate all information for a single analysis of total available evidence (cf. Vane-Wright et al. 1992)...

"As already suggested, to achieve much in this direction will require co-ordination, and agreement on a selection of suitable species for analysis. Only through some form of international co-operation between fieldworkers, comparative morphologists and molecular systematists do we have real prospects for advancing the classification of butterflies - and with it, our understanding of their place in nature."

[R. de Jong, R.I. Vane-Wright & P.R. Ackery, 1996, "The Higher Classification of Butterflies (Lepidoptera) : Problems and Prospects", *Entomologica scandinavica*, 27: 99]

"India should, strictly speaking, be described as comprising the distinctive Peninsula as the primary and principal biogeographical region, with the Himalaya and other Extra-Peninsular parts merely as *biogeographical appendages* of secondary importance...

"The Peninsula *per se* is biogeographically *India vera*, the largest and the oldest region of differentiation of the original floras and faunas of India. Most biologists have, however, failed completely to recognize the dominant place of the Peninsula in the biogeography of India, but have over-emphasized the place and importance of the Indo-Chinese subregion. We thus find that nearly all earlier workers have supposed the Peninsula to have been colonized entirely by genera and species, which were differentiated in Assam-Burma and areas farther east, completely ignoring the fact that the greatest bulk of the true Indian flora and fauna differentiated and evolved in the Peninsula, throughout the Palaeozoic, Mesozoic and Tertiary, right nearly up to the Pleistocene times, and spread extensively into the Extra-Peninsular areas during the late Tertiary. This failure to recognize the Peninsular amphitheatre has led to much confusion and erroneous ideas on the distributional patterns.

"The flora and fauna that differentiated in the Peninsula were indeed the original flora and fauna of India. This complex arose from the ancient stock of Lemuria and the still older Gondwana floras and faunas. This was essentially a tropical humid-forest fauna and was also very widely and continuously distributed not only throughout the Peninsula, but even up to the foot of the newly rising Himalaya, until perhaps relatively recent times. Indeed it extended eastwards even beyond the strict limits of India. The affinities of this fauna were mainly with Madagascar and South Africa, but to some extent also with Australia and South America, especially in the more ancient groups...

"It is also remarkable that the marked...discontinuity must, therefore, be considered as only an impoverishment, but not absolute absence, in the intervening areas (Fig. 162). The faunal impoverishment is of recent origin and was not conditioned by climatic deteriorations in the intervening areas. On the other hand, climatic deterioration and the impoverishment of flora and fauna are concomitant and interrelated effects of human interference. Wherever this interference has been maximum, the impoverishment of flora and fauna and climatic deterioration are also maximum and where man has interfered least, the original flora-fauna complex largely survives, though in an attenuated state."

[M.S. Mani, 1974, "Biogeographical evolution in India", pp. 700-702, 721-722, *In*: Ecology and Biogeography in India, xix+773 pp., Dr W. Junk, The Hague]

A new year has dawned and will also soon initiate a whole new century—the "21st Century Bug" (after 20th Century Fox!) as I like to call it—and may it bring life and luck also to the Century Plant (*Agave americana*), as it is named, and other plants and insects that comprise the basic life-support systems on earth, which enable larger vertebrate animals like birds to exist, use these resources, and multiply. Bird watchers are requested to try and obtain the passion and approach of a naturalist (like those aplenty who abounded in the era of the British Raj here) and seek knowledge also of the Butterflies and Botany of our ecosystems (biogeographical, not political) if not of other biodiversity, that beckons them to search, enjoy and be rewarded with a valuable database other enthusiasts can also benefit from.

The two quotations reproduced above represent the transition I will now make this year, from bird taxonomy to their biogeography, before going on to other, also interesting, aspects of our Ornithology, like evolution, biology and ecology. Before I do this let me explain my use of sometimes lengthy, quotations from others' works. I like to acknowledge earlier workers' research and philosophy, and believe that some of this earlier work, if carefully and intelligently selected, conveys facts and statements better than if adapted and modified by the writer. Much work has been done on our Natural History over the past 200+ years which is, unquestionably, a much needed intellectual treasure for budding polymaths who crave for more and more data, imbibe what they can or consider important, retain the essence and then 'delete' the rest from the mind. These quotations help me to amplify on the subject selected for each of my Letters. What I write about in this column on our sub-continent's birds, from th viewpoint and experience of a scientist, who also happens to be an entomologist, is the result of cerebral churning of facts leading to theories, some of these falsified by further data and then thought and remoulded into revised theories, *ad nauseum*. When I was in the United States doing insect (fly) research, it was impressed upon me by my seniors there that the use of appropriate words, when forming sentences, was critical in putting forward your thoughts unambiguously to the reader. A Dictionary and a Thesaurus are always by my side when I sit down to write, along with other appropriate literature (books, papers) if and when needed. I urge

readers of my Letter to inform me whenever something I write isn't clear or understandable, or even if it is contrary to what they are aware of. Such feedback will help me write better and more appropriate Letters in future and also enable readers to demand from me what is most expected by them.

The first quotation above underlines and vindicates my firmly held disagreement with the recent 'DNA-freaks' who believe that molecular characters are all that are required to understand the phylogeny and relationships of any group of animals or plants. Consensus amongst results from total available evidence, and the need for international cooperation between expert taxonomists, of all concepts, is what I have always felt necessary and still hold essential. Let us not allow "fashion" and short-life fads to determine our will to arrive at the truth, or as close to it as possible, in our lifetimes.

Professor Emeritus M.S. Mani is one of our distinguished, erudite, intellectuals, a pioneer of 'High altitude Entomology' in India, and still active in his 90s. The paper of his I have quoted from above has long been overlooked by biogeographers interested in the fauna and flora of the Indian sub-continent. What Dr Mani's own researches have revealed is the obvious—our *Dravidia* (the Indian Plate) is the centre of evolution of what is our Indian avifauna (also other fauna and flora), and what occurs on the Himalayan ranges and in the Assam-Burma Sub-area is a mixture of this true Indian and the extralimital Indo-Chinese and Indo-Malayan (Eastern Himalaya), Turkmenian (Western Himalaya), and Mediterranean or Eremian (Pakistan and north-west India), fauna and flora. His opinion, that human "interference" has largely been responsible for impoverishment and attenuation of our biodiversity, needs careful and serious study and thought. One other geological event, that is supposed to have taken place from the late Cretaceous to the early Eocene, the fissured eruption of molten lava that formed the Deccan Trap, as is known now, in west-central and south-central India, was also responsible for the destruction of indigenous flora here, along with associated fauna, but this has also been largely ignored and devalued by most of our area's biogeographers. In the next few Letters I will summarize the distribution patterns and the singular peculiarity of our avifauna now found in the major Sub-areas I had illustrated, using a map, in my Letter 21 in *Pitta* # 93, January 1999.

[**Errata**: Letter 32 - *Pitta* # 104, Page 4, Text para 3, Line 6 should read "*Carduelis* Brisson".]

—Dr Kumar Ghorpadé, 1861 Bethel Street, Bangalore 560 043, India & varanus.kg@mailcity.com

...continued from page 2.

"It has been twenty-eight years since the **Oriental white stork** disappeared from **Japan**. The bird stopped inhabiting the Japanese countryside due to the overuse of ago-chemicals in paddy fields that killed the loach, a staple food for the birds. In the hope of seeing the birds in Japan again, the Hyogo prefectural government has earmarked a park for these birds hoping that they would nest there. According to experts, the main reason for the disappearance of the wild Oriental white stork seems to be a breakdown in the balance of nature. Dragonflies, butterflies and aquatic insects such as Japanese diving beetles have all died, while loaches have been driven away. Birds no longer approach paddy fields, and only rice continues to grow even after agro-chemicals have transformed the chemical balance. The shores of many rivers are now concrete and a number of marshlands where birds once went to feed have been reclaimed. Although the areas are still surrounded by greenery, many living beings have gradually been unable to survive there." [*Down to Earth* 8(16): 9. January 15, 2000]

"The **black redstart, *Phoenicurus ochruros***, is protected under **Britain**'s Wildlife and Countryside Act, 1981. The legislation, however, only covers the bird during the breeding season. First noticed in 1926, their numbers increased significantly during the 1940s. But now extinction threatens the bird. Besides nesting sites, the birds need places supporting a wide range of plants and insects. London, after the bombing in 1940, provided the desired environment for the birds to flourish. Since redevelopment has destroyed its habitat, they now depend on new projects, such as the Millennium Dome. The London Wildlife Trust has advised local authorities to ensure that the bird's needs are protected." [*Urban Wildlife News* 16(4). Quoted in *Down to Earth* 8(16): 9. January 15, 2000]

"A **steppe eagle** nest in extreme northwestern **Mongolia** comprised mostly of long bones of domestic animals. It also contained an iron piston rod, a 30cm section of a hay mowing sickle bar, a rubber fly swat and a flattened metal food can.

"On four expeditions (1994, 1995, 1997 and 1998) through Mongolia, David H. Ellis of the USGS Patuxent Wildlife Research Center, Maryland, USA, and James W. Lish of the Oklahoma State University College of Veterinary Medicine, Oklahoma, USA, found many such nests made up of trash gathered by birds as part of the nest-building process (*Ambio*, vol 28, no 6).

"The scientists have reported two kinds of mortality associated with the raptors—though observations were limited to only three species, the golden eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*), the saker falcon and the upland buzzard. The first was death due to entanglement. For instance, on July 1, 1995, a 35-day-old nestling was found with coarse gauze twisted around its legs. Used by the nomadic herders to strain milk and thereafter discarded, gauze fabric is common in raptor nests in Mongolia. During the process of collecting nesting materials, the wide fabric is very often stretched and folded into a narrow band that can snare a leg.

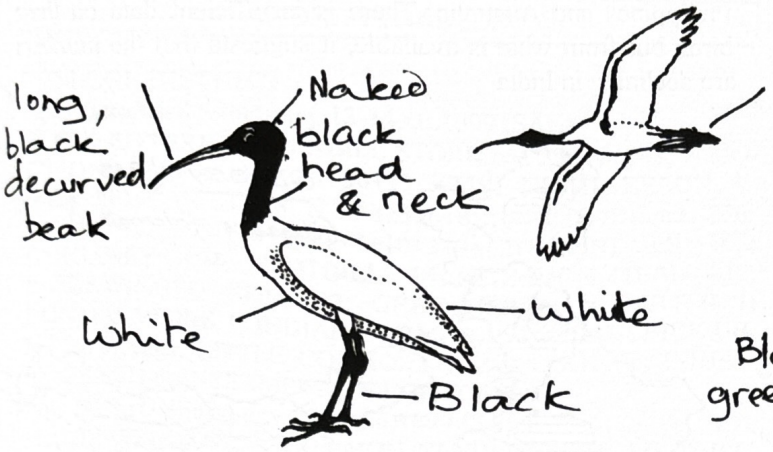
"The second cause of death involved abandoned golden eagle eggs after they were concealed by trash, presumably brought as nesting materials by the adults. On June 3, 1998, the scientists came across a single leaking egg under a thin layer of plastic and paper.

"Across much of Mongolia, trees and perennial shrubs are rare. Therefore, raptors use cloth, bones, paper, wire, and twine as primary components of their nests. However, it has been noted that the use of trash is not essential because raptor nests in areas far from human habitation normally have no trash." [*Down to Earth* 8(16): 9. January 15, 2000]

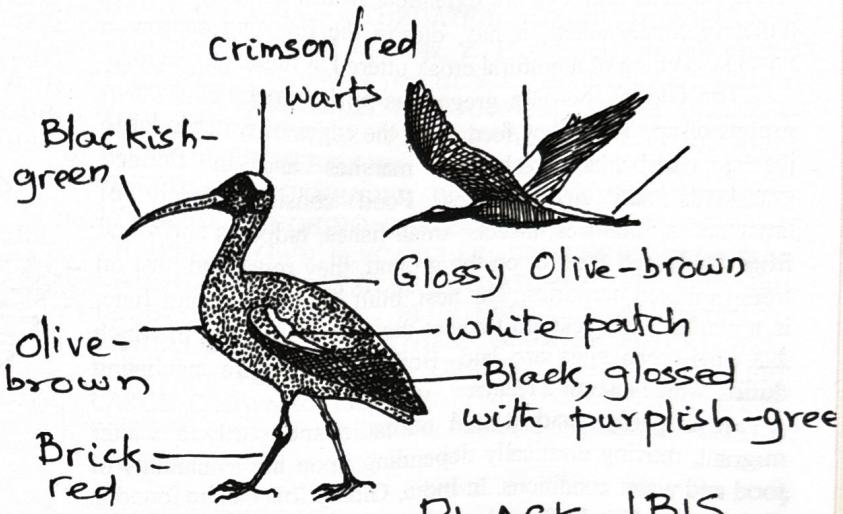
...continued on page 8.

FIELD CRAFT *By* Siraj Taher & Sachin Jaltare

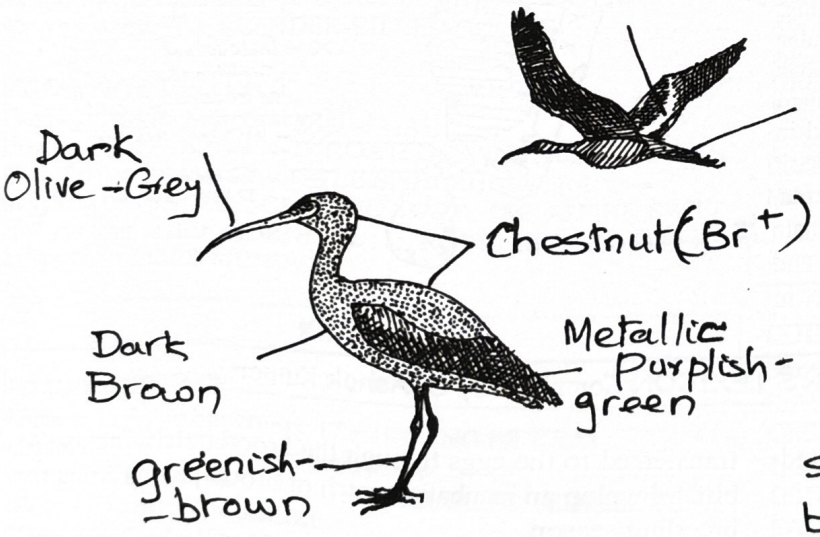
IBISES & SPOONBILL (Family: Threskiornithidae): Ibises are much smaller than storks but sometimes associate with them. Their bills are long and conspicuously decurved. The Spoonbill is overall white with a long spatulate bill. They frequent shallow water, of large *jheels*, marshy land and riverbanks—but roost and nest in trees. Sometimes the birds may be seen feeding in dry cultivation and non-wetland areas also.



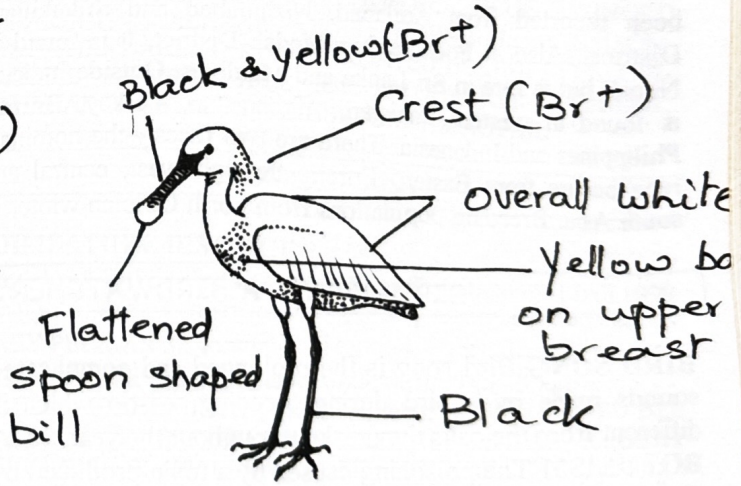
BLACKHEADED (WHITE) IBIS



BLACK IBIS



GLOSSY IBIS



SPOONBILL

Br+ = In breeding

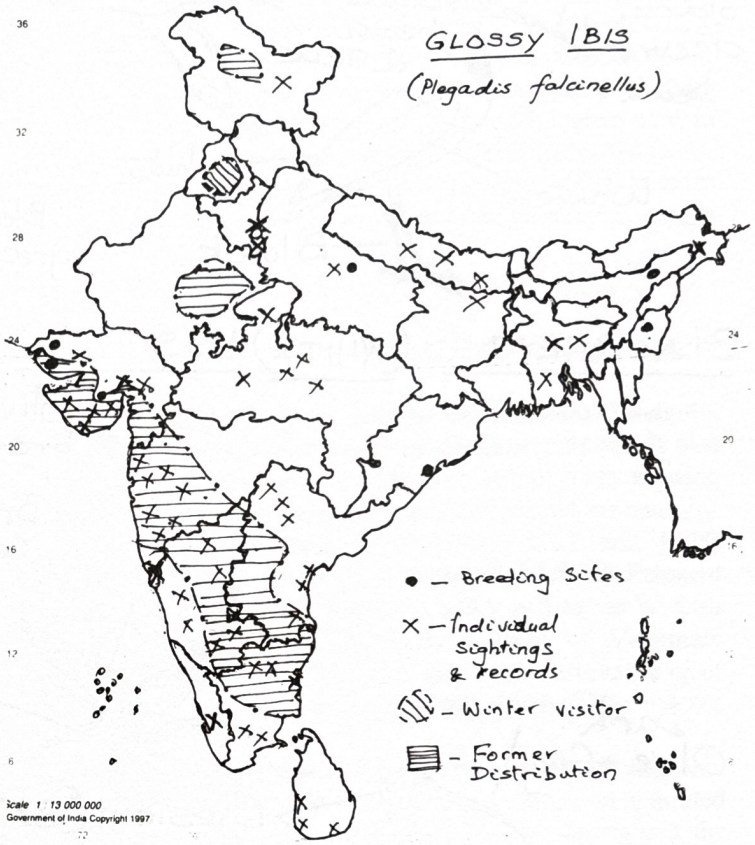
SPOTLIGHT: Glossy Ibis *Plegadis falcinellus* By Siraj A. Taher

This column focuses on birds that are in the Red Data Book of BirdLife International as threatened / highly threatened species. Readers are requested to send information about these birds to the Society.

This is the smallest of the 3 ibises found in India. If you happen to notice it during the breeding season, it will be seen as a dark bird with a slender, down curved, olive-brown bill and greenish brown legs. The head, neck and upper body will be deep chestnut, glossed with purple and green and the wings will have a glistening green in them. Lower body is plain chestnut. Non-breeding birds have their dark brown head and neck streaked with white, the upper back is glossed with purple and green and the under parts are a light chestnut. In flight the neck and legs are extended. Males and females look alike. Normally silent, it has, during the breeding season, a nasal screaming or a guttural croak uttered in flight.

The Glossy Ibis is a gregarious bird, sometimes seen in groups of up to 40. They feed along the edges of water in large jheels, riverbanks, freshwater marshes and in flooded grasslands and rice paddies. Food consists mainly of crustaceans, molluscs, insects, small fishes, tadpoles and small frogs. Although feeding on the ground, they roost and nest on trees in mixed heronries. The nest, built during May and June, is a platform of sticks on trees at the edges of water, in which 2-3 blue-green eggs are laid. Both parents share incubating duties, which last for 21 days.

It is partly resident and nomadic and partly a winter migrant, moving erratically depending upon the availability of food and water conditions. In India, Glossy Ibis can be found in Gujarat and Kutch, Rajasthan, throughout the Gangetic Plains, Assam, Manipur, West Bengal, Orissa and south to peninsular India, Deccan region and Karnataka. In Andhra Pradesh it has been reported from Adilabad, Nizamabad and Srikakulam Districts. Also at Pocharam in Medak District. It is found in Nepal, but is rare in Sri Lanka and Maldives. Outside India, it is found in western Pakistan, Afghanistan, Turkey, Burma, Philippines and Indonesia. There are two races—the nominate race occurs from Eastern Europe through west, central and south Asia. Breeding populations from north Caspian winter in southwest and south Asia and mix with the resident population. Some birds migrate to southwest Asia and northeast Africa. The second race *P. f. peregrinus* breeds in Indonesia, Philippines and Australia. There is insufficient data on these birds but from what is available, it suggests that the numbers are declining in India.



BIRD-*WORD*: A BIRDWATCHER'S LEXICON Compiled by S. Ashok Kumar

BIRD SONG Bird song is the prolonged and complicated sounds made by a bird during breeding season which is different from the calls they make throughout the year.

BOTULISM The poisoning caused by a toxin produced by the bacillus *Clostridium botulinum* growing in poorly preserved food. [Vultures are immune to botulism and can consume enough botulism organisms to kill 3,00,000 guinea pigs. *Ripley's* Believe it or not.]

BREEDING Breeding is production of offspring.

BROOD PARASITISM It is parasitizing the nest of host bird. The obligate brood parasites depend on the host for incubating their eggs and rearing the nestlings. It is also called Nest parasitism

BROOD PATCH Brood patch is a featherless area on the ventral surface of the body of the incubating bird containing anastomosis blood vessels. The heat of the body is transferred to the eggs through the brood patch. Incubating birds develop an incubation patch or brood patch during the breeding season.

BUFFER ZONE The peripheral zone of a protected area, which serves to protect and insulate the nature reserves, is termed as buffer zone.

CALL-NOTES Call-notes are the indistinct sounds made by birds outside breeding season such as contact notes, alarm calls, *etc*. Birds throughout the year use notes and calls.

CALAMUS It is the lower hollow tubular part of scapus or the stem of a feather. Also called quill.

CARINA Carina is the ventral broad plate of the chest bone (sternum) to which the powerful flight muscles are attached, also called Keel.

BIRDING NOTES Compiled by Aasheesh Pittie

This column publishes birding notes in brief telegraphic form, from **Andhra Pradesh, Goa, Haryana, Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra, Punjab, Rajasthan & Tamil Nadu** on interesting and significant sightings and behaviour like breeding, feeding, migration, nesting, *etc*. Notes on flowering and fruiting trees and their relationship with birds are also welcome. English names and classification follow, S.D. Ripley's *A Synopsis of the Birds of India and Pakistan* (1982, 2nd ed.) and scientific nomenclature, T. Inskipp, N. Lindsey & W. Duckworth's *An Annotated Checklist of the Birds of the Oriental Region* (1996). Unless specified, all observations are for 2000. Abbreviations, Contributors, Notes, Regional Referees, *etc*., are at the end. For selection of breeding criteria 'Probable, Possible, Confirmed', see *Pitta* # 82, February 1998, p. 4.

ANDHRA PRADESH

NELLORE DISTRICT

Nellapattu Bird Sanctuary 13-14.xii.1999 (SAK)

BLACK BITTERN 5; OPENBILL STORK ad., 338, yng 48; N 189 (35+11+6+8+13+16+19+8+7+30+11 +25)[1]; NIGHT HERON 4; GREY PELICAN ad., 48, N 37 (23+6+8)[1]; WHITE IBIS ad., 256, yng 8, N 59 (10+10+1+4+10+3+9+12)[1]; PINTAILS 108; GARGANEY 194; SPOTBILL 14; COMMON TEAL 212; BLACKWINGED STILT 12; GREY HERON 2; DARTER 1; PAINTED STORK 1; INDIAN CORMORANT 8; DABCHICK CB, N with 2 eggs; LITTLE CORMORANT 96; COOT 76; INDIAN MOORHEN 4; INTERMEDIATE EGRET 6;

Pulicat Bird Sanctuary 15-16.xii.1999 (SAK)

LITTLE STINT 100+; COMMON SANDPIPER 84; SPOTBILL 120; PINTAIL 86; FLAMINGO & LESSER FLAMINGO 1,000+; PAINTED STORK 53; GREY HERON 6; WHITE IBIS 123; GREY PELICAN 65; COMMON TERN & WHISKERED TERN 100+; CURLEW & WHIMBREL 24;

GOA

NORTH GOA DISTRICT

Chapora River, Estuary of 15.xi.1999 (HL)

EASTERN KNOT 3; SLENDER-BILLED GULL 6+.

SOUTH GOA DISTRICT

Cotigao Wildlife Sanctuary (HL)

29.xi-1.xii.1999: BROWN-THROATED SPINETAIL SWIFT 4+; ROSY MINIVET 1M, 2F; LITTLE SPIDERHUNTER 1.

24-31.xii.1999: BLACK-CRESTED BAZA 1M; ALPINE SWIFT 10+; GREAT PIED HORNBILL 1; ROSY MINIVET 2M, 1F; RUFOUS-BELLIED MUNIA 2.

KERALA

IDUKKI DISTRICT

Chinnar Wildlife Sanctuary 17.x.1999 (NO,PR,KRA)

Altitude 215m: Dry deciduous scrub jungle

BROWN DOVE; BLUEWINGED PARAKEET; EDIBLE-NEST SWIFTLET; BROWN SHRIKE

Mannavan Shola 18.x.1999 (NO,PR,KRA)

Altitude 1,110m: Shola

SCIMITAR BABBLER; QUARKER BABBLER; BLACK AND ORANGE FLYCATCHER; WHITEBELLIED BLUE FLYCATCHER; VERDITER FLYCATHER; NILGIRI VERDITER FLYCATCHER; GREYHEADED FLYCATCHER; LARGE CROWNED LEAF WARBLER; MALABAR WHISTLING THRUSH; WHITEBREASTED LAUGHING THRUSH; BLACKBIRD; VELVETFRONTED NUTHATCH; WHITE EYE.

Marayur 19.x.1999 (NO,PR,KRA)

Altitude 955m: Moist Deciduous Forest

CRESTED HAWK-EAGLE; RUFOUSBACKED SHRIKE; GREY DRONGO; BLACK BULBUL; SPOTTED BABBLER; GREENISH LEAF WARBLER; GREY WAGTAIL

Thattekkad Bird Sanctuary 28-30.xii.1999 (NO,PR,KRA)

Altitude 25-200m: Moist deciduous to evergreen forests with lot of reeds

LITTLE GREEN HERON; JERDON'S IMPERIAL PIGEON; BLOSSOMHEADED PARAKEET; BLUEWINGED PARAKEET; ORIENTAL SCOPS OWL (*Otus scops rufipennis*); BROWN HAWK-OWL; CEYLON FROGMOUTH 1M, hrd 2; MALABAR TROGON; MALABAR GREY HORNBILL; SMALL GREEN BARBET; CRIMSONTHROATED BARBET; SPECULED PICULET CB N-hole on trunk, *c*. 15'-20' up dead *Macaranga peltata* tree. Ad., feeding yng; BLACK WOODPECKER; PIGMY WOODPECKER; HEARTSPOTTED WOODPECKER; BRONZED DRONGO; GREATER RACKET-TAILED DRONGO; HILL MYNA; WHITEBELLIED TREEPIE; YELLOWBROWED BULBUL; BLACKHEADED BABBLER; QUAKER BABBER; WYANAD LAUGHING THRUSH; MALABAR WHISTILING THRUSH; BROWN FLYCATCHER; BROWNBREASTED FLYCATCHER; RUFOUSTAILED FLYCATCHER; WHITEBELLIED BLUE FLYCATCHER; BLUETHROATED FLYCATCHER; TICKELL'S BLUE FLYCATHER; VERDITER FLYCATCHER; PARADISE FLYCATCHER; GREENISH LEAF WARBLER; LARGE CROWNED LEAF WARBLER; GREY TIT; FOREST WAGTAIL; GREY WAGTAIL; SMALL SUNBIRD; LITTLE SPIDERHUNTER.

TRICHUR DISTRICT

Vazhachal forest 29.ix.1999 (NO,PR,KRA)

Altitude 927-1155m: Semi-evergreen moist-deciduous forests

GREY FRONTED GREEN PIGEON; BLUE WINGED PARAKEET; MALABAR GREY HORNBILL; CRIMSONTHROATED BARBET; RUBYTHROATED BULBUL; YELLOWBROWED BULBUL; HILL MYNA; QUARKER BABBLER; MALABAR WHISTLING THRUSH; GREY WAGTAIL

TAMIL NADU

COIMBATORE DISTRICT

Sundaka Muthur Lake (10km from Coimbatore) 17.xii.1999 (SAK)

GREY PELICAN 52, roosting.

Indira Gandhi National Park 20-23.xii.1999 (SAK)

CEYLON FROGMOUTH 1 (Karian Shola); BLUEBEARDED BEE EATER 1; BROADBILLED ROLLER 1; MALABAR GREY HORNBILL 3; MALABAR PIED HORNBILL 3; BRONZE DRONGO 3; HILL MYNA 5; WHITEBELLIED TREE PIE 3.

ABBREVIATIONS: Ab-abundant; ad-adult/s; br-breeding; C-common/ly; CB-confirmed breeding; const-construction/ing; *c*.-approximately; disp-display/ing; F-female; flt-flight; fly-family; freq-frequent/ly; hrd-heard; id-identify/ied; imm-immature; inc-include/ing; Is-Island; juv-juvenile; LM-local migrant; M-male; mat-material; N-nest/ing/s; POB-possible breeding; PRB-probable breeding; plm-plumage; RF-Reserve Forest; Resp-respectively; Tlk-Taluk; vil-village; WL-wildlife; yng-young.

CONTRIBUTORS: Heinz Lainer (HL); KR Anoop (KRA); Nameer Ommer (NO); P Radhakrishnan (PR); S Ashok Kumar (SAK).

NOTES: [1]Number of nests per tree.

REGIONAL REFEREES: Andhra Pradesh: Aasheesh Pittie; Goa: Heinz Lainer; Haryana: Harkirat S. Sangha; Karnataka: J.N. Prasad; Kerala: P.O. Nameer; Maharashtra: Nitin Jamdar; Punjab: H.S. Sangha; Rajasthan: H.S. Sangha; Tamil Nadu: V. Santharam.

NOTES & NEWS

...*continued from page 4.*

We would like to take this opportunity and remind you that some of your **memberships fall due on 1-4-2000**. You will be able to ascertain this from the address label on your envelopes. If the last line reads "31-3-2000", a renewal is due! We urge Ordinary Members to become Life Members of the Society. This helps in increasing the corpus fund of the Society and reduces postage and stationery costs on renewal reminders. It also saves paper! A **Membership Renewal Form** is enclosed for your use. You could do a further good turn to the Society by introducing at least one friend to bird watching by making him/her a member. This simple act, will double the membership of the BSAP.

One in 8 birds faces extinction in next 100 years

One in eight of the world's bird species faces extinction in the next millennium because of damage to the environment, a global wildlife group said on Thursday. BirdLife International, representing 2.2 million people in 105 countries, released a report that said 1,200 bird species could become extinct in the next 100 years, with 600 to 900 more on the verge of joining the list.

Countries with the most birds at risk are Brazil with 111 species, Indonesia (92), China (82), Colombia (81), Peru (79) and India (70), it said. The highest densities of threatened species occur in the Philippines, where 69 face extinction.

The report was issued at a meeting of more than 450 conservationists from BirdLife's 66 partner organisations held in Genting Highlands, 50 km (30 miles) from Malaysia's capital.

"The prospect of one in eight of our birds disappearing forever is unthinkable,'' Queen Noor of Jordan, honorary BirdLife president, said in a statement. "But these figures are the signs of an even greater tragedy. Environmental degradation is now having a very real effect on the lives of millions of people, especially the poor and disadvantaged.''

BirdLife said most birds are threatened by deforestation, burning of vegetation, commercial logging, subsistence farming, plantations, arable farming and mining.

A total of 185 species face a high risk of extinction in the next 10 years.

Most threatened species live in forests. But populations of common countryside birds such as swallows and skylarks in Europe have declined by up to 50 percent in 30 years.

BirdLife launched a plan of action to work with governments to improve ways of exploiting natural resources, identify and protect conservation sites and raise people's awareness. [Reuters, Kaula Lumpur, October 14, 1999 (S. Subramanya on bngbirds@onelist.com)]

"All India Network Project on Agricultural Ornithology, Gujarat University, from 17-20 December 1999, organized a training course in Field Ornithology at Anand, Gujarat. The aim was to train post-graduate students in field techniques so that they may take up ornithological research programmes as a career and help in the conservation of avian biodiversity. The Gujarat Ecological Society, Vadodara, sponsored the course. 14 participants from various universities of Gujarat attended. Dr B.M. Parasharya, an ornithologist of the project, coordinated the training programme. The expert faculty of the university as well as from other organizations imparted training through classroom lectures (theory) followed by practical demonstrations in the laboratory as well as in the field. Various topics of field ornithology ranging from basic bird watching and data recording to census techniques, diversity indexing, as well as trapping and ringing were demonstrated. Participants were taken to important wetlands of Kheda District on 19th and to the Jambughoda Wildlife Sanctuary in Panchmahal District on 21st. Certificates were awarded to participants. A "Manual of Field Ornithology", prepared for this programme, was given to the participants as well as the faculty. A statistical software package for statistical analysis of data was distributed free to participants, thanks to the cooperation of the Department of Agricultural Statistics." —B.M. Parasharya, Anand.

CONTACT CALLS

"I was going through the column, 'Spotlight' on **Black Stork (*Ciconia nigra*)** in *Pitta* # 103, November 1999... during my visit to Kanha National Park situated in Mandla and Balaghat Districts of Madhya Pradesh, on 19-20 December 1999, a solitary Black Stork was sighted in Babathenga Pond of the park during morning drive. Subsequently, my son, during his visit to the park on 22 January 2000, has seen a solitary bird, in ***nullah***, on bison road neear Kanha Meadows, again in morning drive. Mr E.P. Eric D'Cunha has also recorded this species... in a checklist of birds of Kanha NP, prepared by him.

"As regards **White Stork (*Ciconia ciconia*)**, the latest sighting by me is at Bar-nawapara Wildlife Sanctuary, of undivided Raipur District of Madhya Pradesh, on 26 December 1999, where a solitary bird was observed soaring over village Bar. Earlier, in 1992, three birds were seen soaring over village Majholi of Sidhi District (Rewa area), M.P." **—A.M.K. Bharos, Raipur**

For Private Circulation Only

For information, write to: Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh, PO Box 45, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad 500034, India.
Editors: Aasheesh Pittie (3350683) & Siraj A Taher 6572608 **E-mail**: AASHEESH@HD1.VSNL.NET.IN
Membership (Rs): Admission=20; Ordinary=100, Student=25 per annum; Life=1,000. *Outstation cheques not accepted.*
Errata: *Pitta* #105-106, Jan-Feb 2000, the headers on Pps. 2-8 should read "*Pitta* 105-106: January-February 2000".

PITTA

Bulletin of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh No 108: April 2000

PROGRAMME

FIELD OUTING: 16-iv-2000: Anantgiri Hills, Vikarabad, Rangareddi District: Members are requested to assemble near bus stand at Anantgiri, by 8.00am. This will be a full-day trip. Please carry drinking water and lunch. For directions please contact Siraj Taher at 6572608 before 11am or after 4pm.

MEETING: 17-iv-2000, 6 p.m.: AVP by Humayun Taher on Sri Lankamalleshwara Wildlife Sanctuary. Vidyaranya High School, Opp., Secretariat, Saifabad, Hyderabad.

NOTES & NEWS

Happenings at the Society: Field Trip to Manjira Barrage—12.iii.2000

Kiran Katikaneni

Manjira! Ever since a decision was made that to this riverine sanctuary would be our next field trip, I was all excited. This would be my 2nd formal field ornithology trip and also that I started learning the finer details of the avian features.

The journey to Sangareddy was pleasant because of the misty morning and the fast moving bus. *Enroute* I counted 4 Whitebreasted Kingfishers, numerous Black Drongos and Cattle Egrets. This only raised my expectations for a perfect birding day.

I was in the town at 7.15am and the Environment Education Centre (EEC) at Manjira, our rendezvous, was 3km further ahead. Finding no means of transport I decided to walk, with a faint hope of hitching a ride on the way.

I stopped a schoolboy cycling past me and offered to pedal till wherever we would part ways. He was a bright fellow returning home after night school. But pedalling on the *kutcha* road proved more demanding than a quiet walk and before I reached exhaustion point, the boy had to take a different road. Once again I hit the road, at peace with nature. Walking with an eye on the skies above and the fields beside me, I spotted numerous whitebreasted kingfishers, Indian Mynas and Pariah Kites. But, for certain, the bird that caught me off guard was a solitary Openbilled Stork. This was my first sighting of this bird with its characteristic bill. There were numerous twittering sandpipers in the paddies, providing music in the calm countryside.

A kilometer from the venue I met the Plumbers. They paused to ask directions and offered me a ride to the EEC. The centre is well constructed with appealing wooden roof and an enclosure for breeding of Mugger *Crocodylus palustris*. I had a quick look of the informative and well-planned EEC, getting a good look at the species we might encounter.

Aasheesh joined us soon and with a bang spotted a male Paradise Flycatcher. This elusive bird was high up in the canopy of Eucalyptus trees. There was much rejoicing all around at the sight of this elegant bird. The boat-ride to the heronry in mid-stream, resulted in sighting approximately 500 breeding Painted Storks. Nests held 2-3 fluffy white chicks with black bills. A Marsh Harrier and an unidentified *Aquila* sp. Eagle wheeled overhead. Close to the barrage, the air was filled with Redrumped, Common and Wiretailed Swallows, Dusky Crag Martins and House Swifts. Back on shore we were hopful of spotting a few Large Whistling Teals in the large flock of Lesser Whistling Teals. But to our disappointment, the birds did not fly and we could not find clinching evidence of their presence.

I learned to identify Garganeys, now in breeding plumage, and thoroughly enjoyed taking their census. The features of Indian Moorhen, Purple Moorhen and Coot were pointed out to me. We also saw 3 Comb Ducks, Cotton Teal, Bronze-winged and Pheasant-tailed Jacanas, River Terns, Purple Heron, Pied Kingfisher, Roller and Brahminy Kite. Before leaving I spotted a Glossy Ibis—a grand finale to a wonderful day of birding. My interest for field ornithology was further fuelled by this trip and I'd made new friends, apart from the feathered kind!

Extinction in the new century

According to BirdLife International, one in eight of the world's birds faces extinction this century. A terrible 1,200 bird species—perhaps more—are in real danger of becoming extinct in the next 100 years.*

BirdLife International reports that at least 74 bird species have become extinct since 1800, 35 of them in the last 100 years. Around 90% of these recently extinct species lived on islands. They were unable to survive alongside the predators, herbivores, avian diseases and competitors introduced by people. They were also hunted for food and feathers, and lost the natural habitats upon which they depended.

The sad column below presents the birds which have become extinct since 1900. There is nothing so final as extinction. But now it is not just restricted island forms that are in real danger, but the entire mainstream biodiversity of the planet. Before mankind wakes up to the fact that the only solution is control of human population growth, and whilst our generation is, like no other, privileged to enjoy the fantastic diversity of birds that still remains, we should all do all that we can to support organisations like BirdLife International. Such organisations, including the World Wide Fund for Nature and Population Concern, represent the only hope for a much longer list of species—and maybe even the planet itself—to survive into the *next* century. Enjoy your birds and birding, but also support them!

SPECIES	YEAR	LOCALITY
Guadalupe Caracara	1900	Guadalupe
New Zealand Little Bittern	1900	New Zealand
Chatham Islands Rail	1900	Chatham Islands
Greater Amakihi	1901	Hawaii
Choiseul Pigeon	1904	Solomon Island
Auckland Islands Merganser	1905	New Zealand
Black Mamo	1907	Hawaii
Huia	1907	New Zealand
Slender-billed Grackle	1910	Mexico
Carolina Parakeet	1914	North America
Laughing Owl	1914	New Zealand
Lord Howe Gerygone	1920	Lord Howe Island, Australia
Red-moustached Fruit-dove	1922	Marguesas Islands
Norfolk Island Starling	1925	Norfolk Island
Paradise Parrot	1927	Australia
Bonin Thrush	1928	Bonin Islands
Robust White-eye	1928	Lord Howe Island, Australia
Hawaii O'o	1934	Hawaii
Ryukyu Pi veon	1936	Ryukyu Islands, Japan
Grand Cayman Thrush	1938	Cayman Islands
Javanese Lapwing	1940	Java
Laysan Crake	1944	Hawaii
Wake Island Rail	1945	Wake Island
Glaucous Macaw	1955	South America
Piopio	1955	New Zealand
Kakawahie	1963	Hawaii
Akialoa	1967	Hawaii
Canary Islands Oystercatcher	1968	Canary Islands
Bush Wren	1972	New Zealand
Bar-winged Rail	1973	Fiji
Colombian Grebe	1977	Colombia
Guam Bridled White-eye	1984	Guam
Guam Flycatcher	1984	Guam
Aldabra Warbler	1986	Aldabra
Atitlan Grebe	1987	Guatemala

[Anon. (2000): *Birding World* 13(1): 1] (***Editors' Note**: That is the entire bird diversity of the Indian sub-continent!)

A set of the original **Audubon "Birds of America"** folio was auctioned off at Christies for: $8,802,500! This is DOUBLE the previous record price for this set!
[Ian "Birdbooker" Paulsen ipaulsen@linknet.kitsap.lib.wa.us on BIRDCHAT@LISTSERV.ARIZONA.EDU]

New Species!

INDONESIA: N SULAWESI Cinnabar Hawk-Owl *Ninox ios* insert after: *Ninox ochracea* Pamela C. Rasmussen, [*Wilson Bulletin 111, 4 (1999): 457-464.*] The type specimen of **Cinnabar Hawk-Owl** was obtained in 1985 by Frank Rozendaal in what is now known as Bogani Nani Wartabone National Park. At that time it was believed to be a rufous morph of *Ninox ochracea*.

Peacocks and insecticides

"For nearly three years now some of us have been trying, with a very tiny measure of success, to convince our premier natural history organisations to take up studies (or at least write out major projects for funding) concerning pesticides, particularly organochlorines and organophosphates, and their impact on wildlife.

"I have to confess to a certain sense of helplessness. Everyone says the idea is good, but no one is imbued with a sense of urgency. Between thinning egg-shells, feminisation of species, endocrine disruption leading to immune system damage and just plain, ordinary "keel over and die" effects, we are probably sitting by while banned chemicals are let unapposed into ecosystems, seriously affecting the breeding biology of every known species. Yet there is no sense of urgency. Yet the chlorine industry that is closing down around the world is setting up new capacities in India.

"If scientists and field biologists do not sound an early warning alarm, then it is left to people like us -- aware, but chemistry-illiterate -- to try and do the job. We are easily discredited by people who quote obscure references to research findings published by scientists in the pay of the chemical industry.

"I would suggest that scientists on this list make contact with key institutions and at least start looking at target species and areas, such as the tea estates near Mundanthurai, Periyar, Kaziranga, Manas... and species such as sarus cranes, fish eagles, partriges and peacocks. We must start the slow process of establishing the impacts on wildlife and then extrapolate such impacts on human populations. And we can fully expect the weight of the powerful pesticide lobby to be cast against us every step of the way." [Bittu Sahgal bittusahgal@vsnl.com on nathistory-india@lists.Princeton.EDU]

Skylarks on farmland

Birdlovers believe the drastic loss in skylark numbers in the UK in the last three decades is largely the result of farmers sowing cereals in the autumn, not the spring.

A study of 995 skylark nests, between 1996 and 1999, on 24 farms in East Anglia, Oxfordshire and Dorset, found twice the density of skylarks in fields sown with spring cereals compared with crops grown in the autumn.

Before a spring crop is sown, the stubble from the previous crop is left unploughed, and this provides food and cover for the birds during the winter.

The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB), which carried out the research, says spring-grown crops also provide safer nesting sites and encourage the birds to make more attempts at raising a brood.

"Skylarks like short vegetation, and spring crops remain relatively short throughout the breeding season", the RSPB's Alasdair Bright told BBC News Online.

"Winter crops grow high, and leave no bare soil in the field. So the birds nest on the only clear earth they can find, the parallel lines through the crop left by the tractor wheels.

"They stand out there like sore thumbs, and they're a sitting target for predators.

"With spring crops they feel safer, so they breed more often and probably raise more young each time they do."

The RSPB says spring cereals are also more skylark-friendly because they normally have fewer applications of pesticides than winter crops. Between 1968 and 1996 the area of spring-grown cereals in the UK fell from 73% to 16% of the country's total cereal area, a result of the European Union's Common Agricultural Policy and its emphasis on production.

From 1972 to 1996 the total UK skylark population fell by 60%, and by 75% on farmland.

The British Trust for Ornithology says cereals are one of the most important skylark habitats, accounting for 40% of farmland skylarks in England and Wales, and 34% in Scotland.

... Continued on page 4

LETTER FROM AN INSECT-HUNTING ORNITHOLOGIST—34

"Until not long ago bird watching as such was looked down upon by professional zoologists as a childish way of killing time by the idle rich, and as of no scientific importance. To acquire respectability in their eyes and appear truly 'scientific' one had to collect bird skins and eggs-the larger and more wide-ranging your collection the more respect did you command. In other words, collecting and classifying specimens were considered the essence of 'scientific' ornithology. Up to a point the overwhelming emphasis on specimen collecting in the early days was perhaps justified; before one can begin to learn about an organism one must identify it and be able to recognize it from amongst other similar-looking and seemingly related organisms. In this, bird study in India had followed the pattern set by the more advanced western countries. The classification work had to be done mostly by museum specialists, first of the Asiatic Society of Bengal and later by those of the Zoological Survey of India, Calcutta. Thus the bulk of the activities of the earlier upcountry amateur ornithologists were confined largely to the mechanical collecting of bird skins and eggs for vicarious identification in the museum. It is true that large collections of bird skins and eggs from different parts of the country were basic material, and no progress in the study would have been possible without them. But most amateurs had gained the mistaken impression that collecting skins and the publication of local bird lists was the sum total of the contribution they could make, and beyond that-the real 'scientific' contribution-was the province of the professional museum zoologist. However, a time came when sufficient dead material had stock-piled in the larger museums of the world-available on loan to serious workers—**not to need further general collecting except in limited unworked pockets or imperfectly explored areas, and selectively of the lesser known groups or species of birds** [boldface emphasis mine—K.G.] In the meanwhile, as indicated earlier, significant advances had been taking place in the tools, techniques and purposefulness of watching living birds. The perfection achieved by sophisticated optical instruments such as binoculars, telescopes, high speed cameras, telephoto lenses, electronic flash and other equipment, together with the advent of colour illustrated regional field guides on birds had done away with the necessity of killing merely for identification, and also opened up vast opportunities for purposeful bird watching which the accent on ecology had rapidly elevated into scientific respectability. Bird ecology in its broadest sense includes all environmental relationships and physical factors, biotic influences such as habitat, intraspecific contacts such as social structure and population dynamics, and interspecific-relationships such as symbionts, predators and parasites. Ecological research has released ornithology from its confines within the walls of the museum and out of the stereotyped rut of morphology and taxonomy into which it had fallen. It has imparted a refreshing new look to the science and opened up limitless horizons for the field naturalist and student of the living bird. A good field ornithologist today must be a compound of many specializations, or at least of well-informed awareness, of a wide *range* of scientific disciplines. A glance through the contents of any modern ornithological journal-the British *Ibis*, the American *Auk*, or the German *Journal fur Ornithologie*, for instance-will show the vast field that present-day ornithological research covers. It involves not only systematics, genetics, behaviour, vocalization, biometry and statistics, but also related disciplines such as botany, physics, chemistry, geography and others-in fact it is biology in its widest sense. Much of the work has necessarily to be of a co-operative nature involving coordinated team work of ornithologists with specialists in other fields; it has reached a high degree of sophistication. In the wake of these world trends, Indian ornithology has also made some significant progress since 1930 when the last volume of Stuart Baker's *Fauna* was published. Some of the developments in the Ticehurst—Whistler Era have already been referred to [see next two paragraphs quoted below—K.G.]. Since the deaths of these two, the interest of Britishers seems to have drifted away more or less completely from the Indian scene to Africa...

"A beginning towards removing the deficiency pinpointed by Ticehurst of large unworked parts of the country, was soon initiated by the Bombay Natural History Society. With the financial sponsorship of Mr. Arthur Vernay, an American business magnate and big-game hunter, who was also a patron of scientific exploration, a well-planned bird survey was carried out between 1929 and 1931 of the Eastern Ghats, at that time one of the least known areas in the Peninsula. The extensive collections of the Eastern Ghats Survey, critically studied by Whistler and Kinnear with the collaboration of Ticehurst, form the basis of the scientific report published in 16 parts in the *Journal* of the Bombay Natural History Society (Vols. 34-39, 1930-37). This is undoubtedly the most important systematic paper on Indian birds following on the publication of the *New Fauna* and **amply vindicates the need for methodical selective specimen collecting in imperfectly known areas** [boldface emphasis mine - K.G.]. It served as incentive and model of further work on the same lines in other parts of the country. Thus there followed a succession of field surveys between 1930 and 1950 covering the following areas in that order: Jodhpur, Hyderabad, Travancore, Cochin, Central India (Gwalior, Bhopal, Indore, Dhar), Bahawalpur (Punjab) [now in Pakistan - K.G.]. Mysore, Kutch, Gujarat, Bastar, Kanker, and Orissa (including the former Eastern States Agency). Furthermore between 1950 and 1969 a considerable amount of organized collecting and other field work has also been done in Nepal, chiefly by Biswamoy Biswas of the Zoological Survey of India, Walter Koelz, an American ornithologist, and R.L. Fleming, a resident American missionary. Similar field work has been undertaken in Sikkim, Bhutan, NEFA, Nagaland and Manipur by Dillon Ripley, Biswas and myself. Besides the large number of bird skins selectively procured in places whence practically no fresh or properly documented study material existed, all the above surveys were of particular scientific importance because of the special attention paid in the field throughout to ecological problems. In what may be called the *ad hoc* collecting of the past, little consideration was given to this aspect since the skins were amassed mainly with the help of local shikaris or persons without the requisite scientific background. With the exception of the Eastern Ghats and Jodhpur surveys, practically all the rest of the field work was conducted by me personally. Since my own special interest lies in the *living* bird, in problems of bionomics and ecology, it can be claimed without undue modesty that these reports are richer in ecological content than most previous work of this type. The scientific results of all these surveys have been published in various journals or are under preparation, either by myself or jointly with Whistler, Ripley and others. They have also provided the bases for my books on the *Birds of Kutch*, *Birds of Kerala*, and *Birds of Sikkim*; largely also for the comprehensive 10-volume *Handbook of the Birds of India and Pakistan* under the joint authorship of myself and

Dillon Ripley. This work, sponsored by the Bombay Natural History Society and published by Oxford University Press, is intended as a revision and in replacement of Stuart Baker's *Fauna* which is both out of date and out of print.

"**Most but not all the gaps in our knowledge of the distribution of indigenous or resident birds have been fairly adequately plugged by the surveys** [boldface emphasis mine - K.G.]. And we are now in a much surer position than Baker was 40 years ago. Thus the need for a further revision and updating of the Fauna was obvious enough. But a somewhat different format was called for, providing scientifically accurate concise accounts in non-technical language, of life histories and ecology supplemented by simple clues to field identification and, above all, good coloured illustrations. In other words what seemed urgently needed was a popularisation of Indian ornithology. That so little interest exists among our countrymen in bird watching or scientific ornithology even today, and that practically all the work in the past was done by Europeans, has been largely due to the lack of simple illustrated books on Indian birds. Since the first appearance of Whistler's *Popular Handbook of Indian Birds* in 1928 and my own *Book of Indian Birds* in 1941, and several others since, a steady increase in general interest in birds and bird watching has become abundantly evident. It has affected all levels of society and at all ages, and it is to be hoped that with increasing facilities some of the youthful enthusiasts of today will develop into competent ornithologists in time. Bird watching is one of the most enjoyable and satisfying of outdoor hobbies and also one of the least expensive. The only comparativey [*sic*! - K.G.] costly item of equipment needed but one which essential [*sic*! - K.G.] for getting the fullest value from ones [*sic*! - K.G.] opportunities, is a good pair of field glasses. Pencil, paper and patience (in generous quantity) are the only other requisites for purposeful bird watching." **[Sálim Ali, 1971, "Ornithology in India. It's Past, Present and Future",** *Science & Culture*, **37: 362-264]**

Before I commence my analysis of the biogeography of birds so far recorded from the Indian sub-continent, I feel it important and necessary to dwell a little on the "To collect or not to collect" debate, so courageously and logically handled by Pamela Rasmussen in her "A bird in hand or two in the bush?" piece reproduced in *Pitta* # 103, pp. 2 & 4, of November 1999. I have, in earlier Letters, made my point about the unfortunate, commercially related, ascendancy of the amateur bird watcher of these times over the professional ornithologist, and the terrible beating scientific research is taking through immediately required, but largely paranoid, publicity given today to 'conservation'. Even the several 'surveys' that Sálim Ali specified in his above quoted paper were mostly exploratory ones undertaken when funds accrued and time was therefore found for the job on hand. Many 'hot spots' and other rich floral and faunal areas in our sub-continent have hardly seen naturalists or scientists traversing their space, in the 250 years or so since the first natural history studies were initiated by Europeans here. The lavishly illustrated 'coffee table books' and even the INDIAN HANDBOOK (1968-1974, 2nd edition being completed now) do not even tell half the story of our birds and other wildlife, and the wildernesses that house them here, in this extremely naturally rich and territorially vast sub-continent. I believe my duty as a committed scientist, even though by heart a stricken naturalist, is to weigh the balance and bring some truths into focus before this worrisome situation gets out of hand. I can only pray that natives who have pride in their country realize the hopeless and urgent situation with our wildlife and come together to take rapid action.

Sálim Ali has been quoted extensively above, using what I think is one of his finest summaries of the state of ornithology in our sub-continent. By having selectively and succinctly reproduced what he has written about the subject of this Letter, I can now go on to substantiate what Pamela tried to explain to those who ignorantly and blindly lobby against sampling of specimens for scientific research today. Her seventh paragraph in the excerpt printed by our editors that begins with "If birders want their contributions to be recognized by science, then they need to realize the limitations of birding", and also her last paragraph, which no-nonsensically exposes the major factors for bird deaths, lucidly demolish the illogical stand taken by what one can only term 'Gandhian' (non-violence ideology) conservationists. I myself have been appalled and shocked by the rock-hard logic of such humans, including some good friends of mine whom I respect otherwise for their selfless fight against depletion of our natural wildernesses and wildlife. Many of these people seem happy vociferously 'protecting' the tiger (but not even squeaking for the flora that make up ecosystems here and give the fauna life-support systems!) and aren't in the least curious about the thousands, if not millions, of plants and animals that exist out there in our sub-continent even today, many unknown to Science and still nameless.

The tiger, although a superbly handsome big cat, is not even originally Indian, like the beautiful blackbuck antelope is, and, unless conservationists fiercely *chipko* for a total ban on all logging (like in Thailand) in undisturbed and even the 'reserve forest' areas in India and neighbouring countries, thus forcing humanity to grow trees, shrubs and herbs for commercial and medicinal demand, in the already deforested agricultural and 'waste' lands, I see no hope for our biodiversity. The first decade of this new 21st Century is absolutely critical. We need to protect undisturbed ecosystems and restore disturbed ones that are neglected as 'wastelands', so then whatever fauna and flora that still abounds here will experience the privacy it needs and be able to evolve and multiply in seclusion, away from the horrid interference of the human being, conservationist or not. Like medical research is badly needed to understand and create remedies for debilitating human diseases like malaria and aids, sampling our biodiversity and researching them is absolutely essential in comprehending the natural world and then devising suitable measures to protect and study what still exists. What we have not created we have no right to destroy or annihilate.

—Dr Kumar Ghorpadé, 1861 Bethel Street, Bangalore 560 043, India & varanus.kg@mailcity.com

...Continued from page 2

Mark Avery, the RSPB's conservation director, said: "Increasing the area of spring-grown cereals is a feasible solution".

He added: "This is an opportunity not to be missed, and it would go a long way to helping farmers meet the challenge of skylark conservation."

A spokeswoman for the National Farmers Union told BBC News Online: "Part of the pressure for the switch to winter-grown crops has come from retailers, and farmers have been forced to do it to remain cost effective."

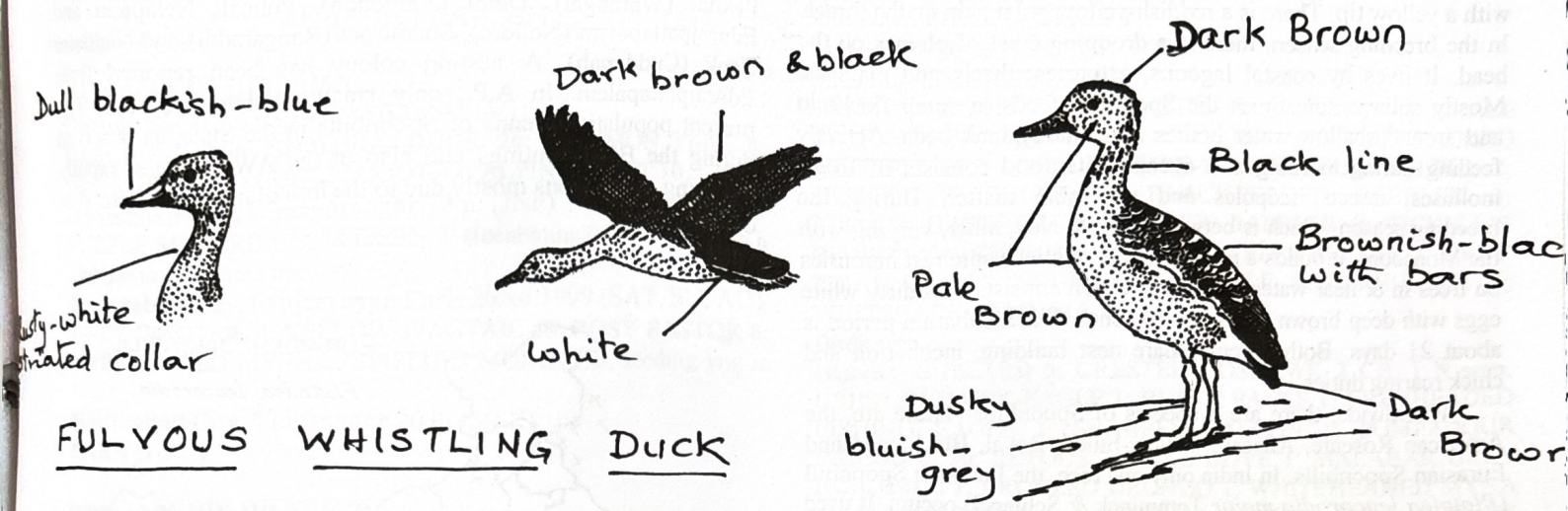
["Could something similar be happening in India to our smaller birds?"

Ullas P.A. ullaspa@mailandnews.com quoting *BBC* Wildlife on bngbirds@onelist.com.]

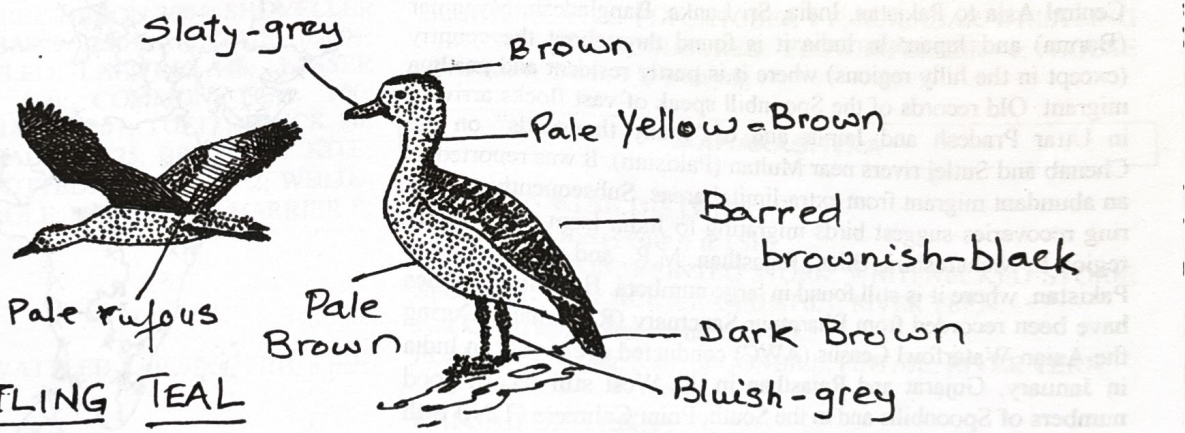
...Continued on page 8

FIELD CRAFT *By* Siraj Taher & Sachin Jaltare

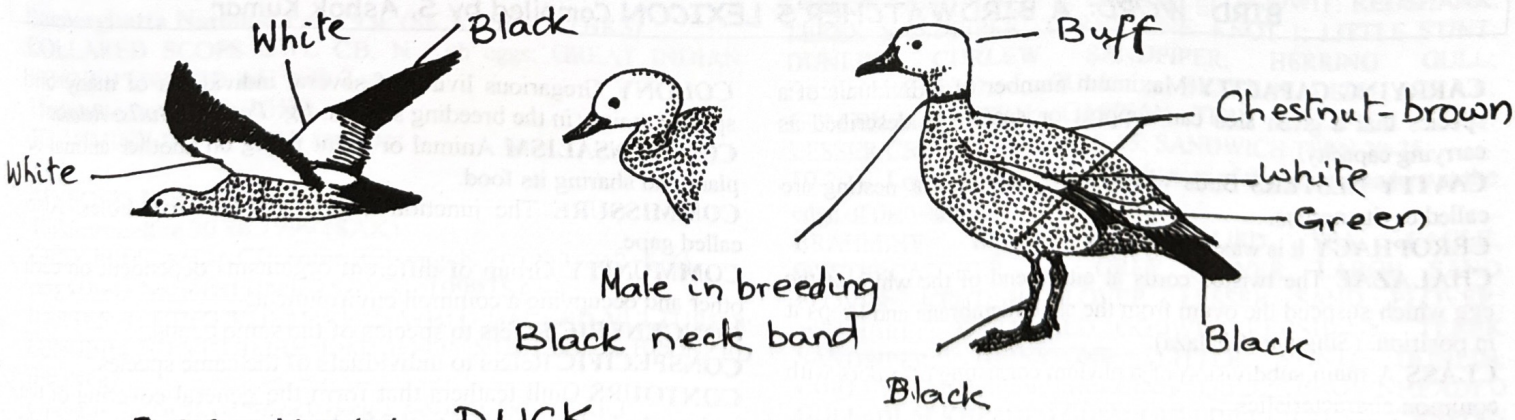
GEESE & DUCKS (Family: Anatidae): This is a very diverse and large group of waterbirds of varying sizes and colours, having flat beaks, webbed feet and short tails. These birds are mostly seen in large flocks or small parties. The regularity of their appearance between October and March every year throughout India on all types of inland water-bodies is a spectacular example of bird migration. Most species coming to A.P. are migratory, barring four.



FULVOUS WHISTLING DUCK



LESSER WHISTLING TEAL



BRAHMINY DUCK

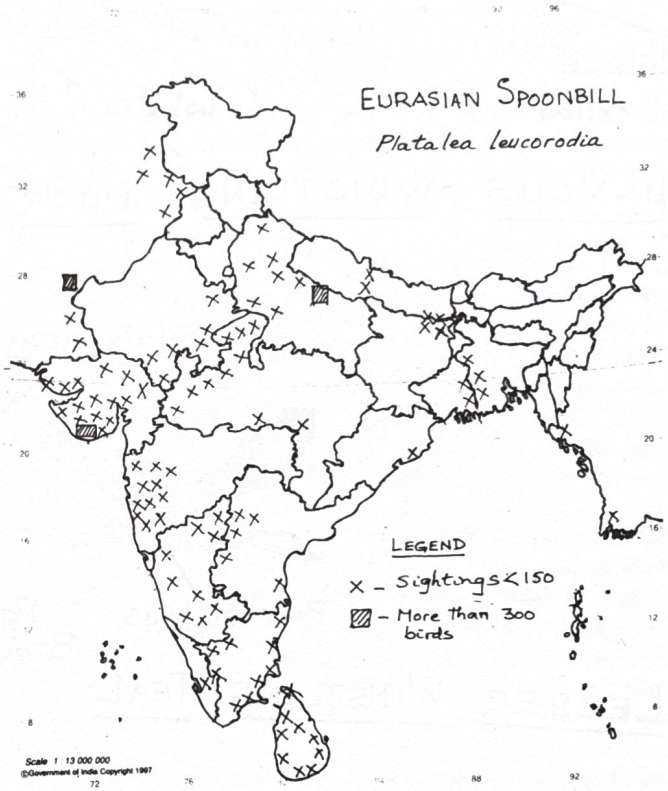
SPOTLIGHT: Eurasian Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia* By Siraj A. Taher

This column focuses on birds that are in the Red Data Book of BirdLife International as threatened / highly threatened species. Readers are requested to send information about these birds to the Society.

The Eurasian Spoonbill is a large graceful wading bird found throughout Europe and Asia. Snow-white with long black legs, it has a distinctive, large and flat, spatulate black bill with a yellow tip. There is a reddish-yellow gular skin on the throat. In the breeding season, there is a drooping crest of plumes on the head. It lives by coastal lagoons, estuaries, jheels and marshes. Mostly soliary, sometimes the Spoonbill feeds in small flocks in and around shallow water bodies and muddy tank beds. Actively feeding during morning and evening, its food consists of frogs, molluscs, insects, tadpoles and vegetable matter. During the breeding season, which is between July & November, varying with the Monsoons, it builds a platform nest of sticks amongst heronries on trees in or near water. A normal clutch consists of 4 dirty white eggs with deep brown spots and blotches. The incubation period is about 21 days. Both parents share nest building, incubation and chick rearing duties.

Worldwide, there are 6 species of Spoonbills. These are, the American Roseate, African, Yellow-billed, Royal, Blackfaced and Eurasian Spoonbills. In India only one race, the Eurasian Spoonbill (*Platalea leucorodia major* Temminck & Schlegel) occurs. It used to be widely spread through Central and Southern Europe, Africa, Central Asia to Pakistan, India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Myanmar (Burma) and Japan. In India it is found throughout the country (except in the hilly regions) where it is partly resident and partly a migrant. Old records of the Spoonbill speak of vast flocks arriving in Uttar Pradesh and Jaipur and of "many thousands" on the Chenab and Sutlej rivers near Multan (Pakistan). It was reported as an abundant migrant from extra-limital areas. Subsequently several ring recoveries suggest birds migrating to India from the Caspian region to Maharashtra, Bihar, Rajasthan, M.P., and also to Sind in Pakistan, where it is still found in large numbers. Breeding colonies have been recorded from Bharatpur Sanctuary (Rajasthan). During the Asian Waterfowl Census (AWC) conducted every year in India in January, Gujarat and Rajasthan in the West still record good numbers of Spoonbills and in the South, Point Calimere (T.N.) is th only place where a reasonable population is recorded during the AWC.

In A.P., old observations record more than 200 Spoonbills nesting at "Kolair" (Kolleru Lake, W. Godavari District) and also specimens from Tada in Nellore District. Recent records are from Pakhal (Warangal), Dindi (Nalgonda), Pulicat, Nelapattu and Edurajpatlapalem (Nellore), Shamirpet (Rangareddi) and Nandalur Tank (Cuddapah). A nesting colony has been reported from Edurajpatlapalem. In A.P., only small numbers are seen. The present population trends of Spoonbills in the State, as observed during the BSAP outings and also in the AWC suggest rapidly declining populations mostly due to the loss of habitat and pressure on wetlands.



BIRD-*WORD*: A BIRDWATCHER'S LEXICON Compiled by S. Ashok Kumar

CARRYING CAPACITY Maximum number of individuals of a species that a given area can support or sustain is described as carrying capacity.

CAVITY NESTERS Birds which make cavities for nesting are called cavity nesters.

CEROPHAGY It is wax-eating habit.

CHALAZAE The twisted cords at either end of the white of the egg which suspend the ovum from the shell membrane and keeps it in position. (Singular: Chalaza).

CLASS A main subdivision of a phylum consisting of orders with common characteristics.

CLINE Changes which take place in a species according to the environment in which it lives.

CLOACA The aperture below the tail into which open the rectum and urino-genital ducts.

CLUTCH A group of eggs produced and cubated more or less together by one pair.

COLONY Gregarious living of several individuals of many bird species mainly in the breeding season. *Eg: Petrels, Gulls, Rooks*

COMMENSALISM Animal or plant living on another animal or plant and sharing its food.

COMMISSURE The junction line of the two mandibles. Also called gape.

COMMUNITY Group of different organisms dependent on each other and occupying a common environment.

CONGENERIC Refers to species of the same genus.

CONSPECIFIC Refers to individuals of the same species.

CONTOURS Quill feathers that form the general covering of the body and which give shape to the body. They are smaller and wooly having poorly developed barbules.

CORIOLIS FORCE The mechanical effects produced by earth's rotation. As a result of this rotation, the weight of a flying bird changes. The Coriolis force is strongest at the poles and is zero at the equator. It is believed that birds sense their 'latitude' by the effects of the force.

BIRDING NOTES Compiled by Aasheesh Pittie

This column publishes birding notes in brief telegraphic form, from **Andhra Pradesh, Goa, Haryana, Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra, Punjab, Rajasthan & Tamil Nadu** on interesting and significant sightings and behaviour like breeding, feeding, migration, nesting, *etc*. Notes on flowering and fruiting trees and their relationship with birds are also welcome. English names and classification follow, S.D. Ripley's *A Synopsis of the Birds of India and Pakistan* (1982, 2nd ed.) and scientific nomenclature, T. Inskipp, N. Lindsey & W. Duckworth's *An Annotated Checklist of the Birds of the Oriental Region* (1996). Unless specified, all observations are for 2000. Abbreviations, Contributors, Notes, Regional Referees, *etc*., are at the end. For selection of breeding criteria 'Probable, Possible, Confirmed', see *Pitta* # 82, February 1998, p. 4.

ANDHRA PRADESH

HYDERABAD DISTRICT

Hussain Sagar 26.xii.1999 (SAT, SU, AO)
DABCHICK 200+; SPOTBILL DUCK 26; COMMON TEAL 4; BROWNHEADED GULL 2; COOT 42; ALPINE SWIFT 10.

Hyderabad City, Himayatnagar 13.ii: (JNP)
PURPLE SUNBIRD CB, M feeding F (incubating?). N *c*. 7' up on a *Thespesia populnea* tree.

Hyderabad City, Sanjeevayya Park 26.xii.1999 (SAT, SU, AO)
GREY WAGTAIL 4; YELLOW WAGTAIL 40; ROSY PASTOR 8; GREYHEADED MYNA 2; SPOTTED MUNIA CB, feeding yng in N.

Hyderabad City, Vidyanagar 20.iii (MSK)
BARN OWL 1.

RANGAREDDI DISTRICT

Edulabad 6.ii: (JVDM, HT, VT, MKP)
CORMORANT 150, 20+ imm; GREY HERON 300+; SHOVELLER 2000+; REDCRESTED POCHARD 200+; PINTAIL 6500+; SPOTBILL 250+; REDWATTLED LAPWING 40; LESSER FLAMINGO 1; GARGANEY 100; COMMON TEAL 100; WIGEON 25; COMMON POCHARD 250+; TUFTED DUCK 20; BLACKWINGED STILT 425; GADWAL 75; BRAHMINY KITE; WHITENECKED STORK 5; SPOTTED REDSHANK 2; WHITE-EYED BUZZARD; BOOTED EAGLE; MONTAGU'S HARRIER F; STONE CHAT.

Nadergul 22.ii (HJ, HTJ)
WRYNECK 1.

Vikarabad 4.iii: (SU, NSK)
BLACK STORK 6; YELLOW-WATTLED LAPWING PRB, a pair in-cupola.

KARNATAKA

BANGALORE DISTRICT

Bannerghatta National Park 9.ii: (SK,AP,SB,PAU,NRS)
COLLARED SCOPS OWL CB, N with eggs; GREAT INDIAN HORNED OWL CB, ad., with 2 yng.

Hosakote tank 26.i: (UHK)
BRAHMINY DUCK 1 on a sand bar.

MYSORE DISTRICT

Kokkarebellur 30.xii.1999 (SAK)
GREY PELICAN 36 CB, some with yng. N 20 (2+3+2+2+5+6)

Nagarhole National Park 25-28.xii.1999 (SAK)
DARTER 1; KING VULTURE 2; WHITEBACKED VULTURE 8; LONGBILLED VULTURE 1; GRIFFON VULTURE 1; BRONZED DRONGO 1.

Ranganathittu Bird Sanctuary 29-30.xii.1999 (SAK)
DARTER 2; WHITE IBIS 8; OPENBILL STORK 12; WHITENECKED STORK 1; SPOONBILL 9; BROWNHEADED GULL 1.

KERALA

COIMBATORE DISTRICT

Top Slip 9-16.ix.1999 (AE)
Birds ringed in BNHS Camp.
SPOTTED DOVE 1; COLLARED SCOPS OWL 1; SMALL GREEN BARBET 4; LARGER GOLDENBACKED WOODPECKER 1*; RUBYTHROATED YELLOW BULBUL 2; SPOTTED BABBLER 1; BLACKHEADED BABBLER 3; RUFOUS BABBLER 3; QUAKER BABBLER 2; TICKELL'S BLUE FLYATCHER 1M; THICKBILLED WARBLER 1; GREY TIT 1; SMALL SUNBIRD 4; LITTLE SPIDERHUNTER 5; WHITEBACKED MUNIA 2.
Birds seen.
HONEY BUZZARD 5; CRESTED GOSHAWK 2 CB, 1 N seen; CRESTED HAWK-EAGLE 1; BLACK EAGLE 1; GREYHEADED FISHING EAGLE 1; SHAHEEN FALCON 1; POMPADOUR PIGEON *c*. 30; RUFOUS TURTLE DOVE 1; MALABAR GREY HORNBILL 1; BRONZED DRONGO 1; WHITEHEADED MYNA *c*. 20; HILL MYNA 2; WHITEBELLIED TREE PIE 1; RUFOUS BABBLER 6; WHITEBELLIED BLUE FLYCATCHER 1 M; BLUETHROATED FLYCATCHER 1 F; MALABAR WHISTLING THRUSH; PLAINCOLOURED FLOWERPECKER 1; HOUSE SPARROW 2 CB, 1 N with yng.

MAHARASHTRA

AHMADNAGAR DISTRICT

Pawarwadi Reservoir 6.ii: (SK)
PURPLE HERON; PAINTED STORK; WHITENECKED STORK; SPOONBILL; BLACKWINGED STILT; RIVER TERN.

Rui Chatrapati Reservoir 6.ii: (SK)
FLAMINGO 4 yng, 3 ad; SPOONBILL; PINTAIL; RIVER TERN.

RAIGAD DISTRICT

Alibag (Akshi Beach) 5-6.i (NJ)
BRAHMINY KITE; WHITEBELLIED SEA-EAGLE; OYSTERCATCHER; GREY PLOVER; LARGE SAND-PLOVER; LESSER SAND-PLOVER; BARTAILED GODWIT; REDSHANK; TEREK SANDPIPER; TURNSTONE; KNOT 1; LITTLE STINT; DUNLIN; CURLEW SANDPIPER; HERRING GULL; BROWNHEADED GULL; BLACKHEADED GULL; GULLBILLED TERN; CASPIAN TERN 1; LITTLE TERN; LESSER CRESTED TERN 10-15; SANDWICH TERN 20-25.
19-20.ii: Low tide exposing muddy area of the beach (waders at the edge of the water).
BRAHMINY KITE; WHITEBELLIED SEA EAGLE; OYSTERCATCHER 7-8; GREY PLOVER; LARGE SAND PLOVER; KENTISH PLOVER; LESSER SAND PLOVER; WHIMBREL; BARTAILED GODWIT; REDSHANK; TEREK SANDPIPER; TURNSTONE; LITTLE STINT; DUNLIN; CURLEW-SANDPIPER; HERRING GULL; BROWNHEADED GULL; BLACKHEADED GULL; GULLBILLED TERN; CASPIAN TERN 1; LITTLE TERN; LESSER CRESTED TERN 10-15.

SOLAPUR DISTRICT

Hipparga Tank 30.x.1999 (NJ)
GREY HERON; PAINTED STORK 3; OPEN BILL STORK 3; WHITENECKED STORK 3; BLACK IBIS 5; SPOONBILL 30-35; FLAMINGO 16; SPOTBILLED DUCK 40-50; WIDGEON 100-

120; . HONEY BUZZARD? 1; MARSH HARRIER; COMMON CRANES 8-10; LITTLE RINGED PLOVER; GREENSHANK; COMMON SANDPIPER; BLACK HEADED GULL 2; GULL BILLED TERN; RIVER TERN; GREAT HORNED OWL 1; GREY HORNBILL 1; COMMON SWALLOW; LESSER WHITETHROAT; YELLOW WAGTAIL.

TAMIL NADU

ABBREVIATIONS: Ab-abundant; ad-adult/s; br-breeding; C-common/ly; CB-confirmed breeding; const-construction/ing; *c.*-approximately; disp-display/ing; F-female; flt-flight; fly-family; freq-frequent/ly; hrd-heard; id-identify/ied; imm-immature; inc-include/ing; Is-Island; juv-juvenile; LM-local migrant; M-male; mat-material; N-nest/ing/s; POB-possible breeding; PRB-probable breeding; plm-plumage; RF-Reserve Forest; Resp-respectively; Tlk-Taluk; vil-village; WL-wildlife; yng-young.

CONTRIBUTORS: Amir Osman (AO); Amitabh Epur (AE); Arpana Srivatsa (AS); Hatim Jaffer (HTJ); Hyder Jaffer (HJ); Humayun Taher (HT); JVD Moorty (JVDM); MK Prasad (MKP); NR Swamy (NRS); Nitin Jamdar (NJ); PA Ullas (PAU); S Ashok Kumar (SAK); S. Karthikeyan (SK), Sanjay Balachandran (SB), Siraj A. Taher (SAT); Sudhakar M Kurhade (SK); U. Harish Kumar (UHK); Vinay Totawar (VT).

NOTES: * Recovered after 16 years!.

REGIONAL REFEREES: Andhra Pradesh: Aasheesh Pittie; Goa: Heinz Lainer; Haryana: Harkirat S. Sangha; Karnataka: J.N. Prasad; Kerala: P.O. Nameer; Maharashtra: Nitin Jamdar; Punjab: H.S. Sangha; Rajasthan: H.S. Sangha; Tamil Nadu: V. Santharam.

Notes & News

... continued from page 4.

Grey Pelicans breeding at Uppalapadu

Uppalapadu Tank, in Uppalapadu village (Guntur District, A.P.), attracts 35 species of waterbirds. These include migratory birds and resident, breeding species. The star among these is the Grey Pelican, 26 of which arrived this year and have commenced nesting. This tank has become an important heronry with approximately 3,500 Painted Storks and 5,000 Openbill Storks with 500 nests. Night Herons also nest here. The migrant population of Rosy Pastors varies from 300 to 10,000. The tank is threatened by villagers who feel that the birds are fouling the water with their droppings—spreading infection and disease. They want to clear-fell all vegetation so that birds do not use the area. Uppalapadu is important as the Grey Pelican nests here as also do large numbers of Painted and Openbill Storks.

—K. Mrutyumjaya Rao & K. Ramana Kumar in *Newsletter for Birdwatchers*. January-February 2000, vol., 40(1): back-cover.

Hodgson's Bushchat *Saxicola insignis* in India

"The above species was formerly regularly recorded from many areas in northern India but these records are in many cases very old. It now appears to be only recorded on a regular basis in India from Assam. I am conducting research into how many may now be wintering in Assam and would welcome any records of this species seen in Assam, from 1990 up to the present date, possibly detailing numbers, sex and age .If you have any records from 1990 onwards for other areas of India I would also be interested in these. All records will be acknowledged."[Ewan Urquhart Ewan@oxfordms.co.uk on orientalbirding@egroups.com]

Calendar of Events

23.ix.2000—1.x.2000, Nepal: International Symposium on Galliformes. Info., from Prof. A.H. Musavi, Secretary, W.P.A. India, 6 Kabeer Colony, Anoop Shahar Road, Aligarh 202002.

23-29.x.2000, Kandy, Sri Lanka: PASOC 2000, Second Pan Asian Ornithological Congress. Contact address: PASOC 2 Secretariat, Field Ornithology Group of Sri Lanka, University of Colombo, Colombo 03, Sri Lanka. Email: fogsl@slt.lk.

25-28.ix.2001, Australian Ornithological Conference: hosted by Charles Sturt University in Bathurst, NSW. Website: http://clio.mit.csu.edu.au/aoc2001. For details contact Dr Andrew M. Fisher at afisher@csu.edu.au.

Membership Matters

- A **Membership Renewal Form** *is* included with this issue of *Pitta*. Please send in your memberships early and help us with the smooth flow of BSAP's activities.
- Sachin Jaltare has designed a new logo for the Society, depicting a flying Indian Pitta and the acronym of the Society. It is given below.
- Sachin has also designed the logo for BNHS's Indian Bird Conservation Network (IBCN), depicting an Indian Treepie, as shown below.

For Private Circulation Only

For information, write to: Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh, PO Box 45, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad 500034, India.

Editors: Aasheesh Pittie (3350683) & Siraj A Taher (6572608) **E-mail**: aasheesh@hd1.vsnl.net.in

Membership (Rs): Admission=20; Ordinary=100, Student=25 per annum; Life=1,000. *Outstation cheques not accepted.*

12.6.2000

PITTA

Bulletin of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh No 109-110: May-June 2000

PROGRAMME

Indexed 13/2/2001

FIELD OUTING: 18-vi-2000: KBR National Park, Jubilee Hills, Hyderabad District: Members are requested to assemble near main gate opposite TDP office, by 7.30am. This will be a half-day trip. Please carry drinking water. For directions please contact Siraj Taher at 6572608 before 11am or after 4pm.

MEETING: 19-vi-2000, 6 p.m.: AVP by Sri GVVSDS Prasad, Chairman, VASORD, on watershed management and the Million Trees programme in Kakanoor village. A peoples' movement to green Mahbubnagar District. Vidyaranya High School, Opp., Secretariat, Saifabad, Hyderabad.

NOTES & NEWS

Function of the alula

"...Biologists seem to assume that the alula functions as a turbulator which delays stalling when deployed with the wing at high angles of attack. Although this is a perfectly reasonable assumption given what's known about how turbulators work on fixed wing aircraft, I haven't found anyone who has actually tested that hypothesis on bird wings." —Patrick Norton.

"In soaring birds, the alula is also sometimes used to *cause* stalling. I've actually watched vultures do this many times at close quarters in an unusual situation in North Africa—the lip of a 500'-deep canyon in Eastern Algeria, where Egyptian Vultures would ride the up-draught against the cliff, hang motionless on the wind for 10-20 seconds, sometimes as close as ten or fifteen feet away from a cliff-top observer, then flick up their alulae to break the airflow over the wing, instantly stall and drop away into the canyon." —James West [Quoted by P. Shyamal on bngbirds@egroups.com from ornith-l@listserv.uark.edu.]

Time-keeping Pitta

WWF-Indonesia researchers in the Supiori Nature Reserve found that birdwatching became a time-keeping exercise. The Red-bellied Pitta *Pitta erythrogaster* is on the ground when its song indicates that the morning has come. As the sun rises, it will climb up a tree until it reaches the top at noon. Then, as the sun begins its descent, the bird will climbdown the tree, branch by branch, return to the ground and go back to its nest just as the sun sets at 6.00pm. It can also predict the weather. It will stay on the ground if it is going to rain. [Kyla Evans, WWF International Press Officer, on orientalbirding@egroups.com].

More on Audubon's "Birds of America"

March 10, 2000-Christie's set a world auction record today for a printed book when an original four-volume subscriber set of Audubon's masterpiece, The Birds of America, estimated to sell for $4 million, sold for an impressive $8,802,500. Today's price smashes Christie's previous record of $7.6 million for Chaucer's The Canterbury Tales sold at Christie's London in July 1998. Felix de Mariz Oyens, senior director of the International Book Department, adds: "The result is indicative of the expansion and size of the rare book market. The three most expensive printed books and the two most expensive manuscripts ever sold were auctioned by Christie's International Book Department." In a saleroom that was filled to capacity, bidders both on the telephones and in the saleroom competed feverishly for the choicest items. The entire sale totaled $10,375,855. The sale was transmitted live by video-link to Christie's new saleroom in Paris during the opening dinner there.

The stunning four-volume set of John James Audubon's Birds of America offered by Christie's New York on March 10 was widely expected to top its $3-4 million estimate. But few anticipated that it would soar to $8,802,500, flying past the previous record for a printed book, $7.6 million, set by Geoffrey Chaucer's The Canterbuuy Tales at Christie's London in 1998. The buyer was Sheik Al Thani of Qatar, an ardent book, print and map collector who won a heated bidding war with New York dealer W. Graham Arader III. After the sale, Arader said he had planned to bid as high as $6 million. "I agonizingly bid $7.8 million--but boom! Al Thani [bidding by phone] said $8 million, just like that. He just crushed me," he said. "I got stomped!" According to Arader, the auction's anticipated drama was such that Christie's owner, Francois Pinault, had the sale shown on a TV during a dinner party he was hosting at the firm's new salesroom in Paris. [Robert Winkler rwinkler@snet.net on birdchat@listserv.arizona.edu.]

Mourning Dove declines and habitat changes

According to Breeding Bird Survey data, mourning dove numbers have declined significantly in parts of the West since 1966. Many factors have been suggested for the declines, and there may be different causes in different areas. A recent study in Utah, comparing data from 1950-51 and 1992-93 suggests that land use change may have been the primary cause of the decline in that area ("Changes in Land Use as a Possible Factor in Mourning Dove Population Decline in Central Utah." William D. Ostrand, Paul M. Meyers, and John A. Bissonette. Journal of Field Ornithology 69:192-200). The authors were able to replicate a call-count study of mourning doves done in the area in 1951-52 and to use aerial photographs taken of the area at that time with recent photographs to calculate land-use changes. They found that between 1951-52 and 1993 there was an 82 percent decline in dove populations in the arca. Their surveys showed that the birds foraged almost

exclusively on recently harvested winter wheat fields and at livestock pens containing cattle.

A comparison between the two periods showed that while the number of cattle in the area increased from 36,000 to 55,000, the number of farms with cattle declined 61 percent, reducing the number of sites available for foraging. The biggest change, however, was in the number of farms planting winter wheat, a decline of 82 percent. Comparison of other habitats between the two periods showed little change, including no change in the riparian habitat mourning doves use for nesting in the area.

The authors point out that it is not possible to calculate the possible effect of other factors, such as pesticide poisoning, but that the data from this study strongly suggest a correlation between a loss of the primary habitat used for foraging and population declines. Most of the land previously used for winter wheat had been converted to fallow grassland. Their surveys showed that doves rarely used fallow grassland for foraging. If the loss of recently harvested winter wheat fields is the cause of the decline, the problem for the doves is probably not starvation, but lack of resource during the nesting period, resulting in lower productivity, the later onset of nesting, and fewer broods attempted each year. [*Source unknown*]

India's cost of environmental degradation

India's environmental costs have been estimated at $9,715 million a year, or 4.53 per cent of the country's gross domestic product (GDP). This has been disclosed in the first-ever status report prepared by the environment and forests ministry.

The costs were calculated on the basis of the impact of pollution on air, water, land and soil, as also on tourism besides the environmental damage caused by deforestation. The estimates are for 1995.

According to the report, urban air pollution accounts for an annual loss of $1,310 million a year, water pollution $5,710 million, soil degradation 1,642 million, land degradation $328 million, deforestation $214 million and loss to tourism accounts for $213 million.

Altogether 40,351 premature deaths due to air pollution were reported in 36 cities in 1995.

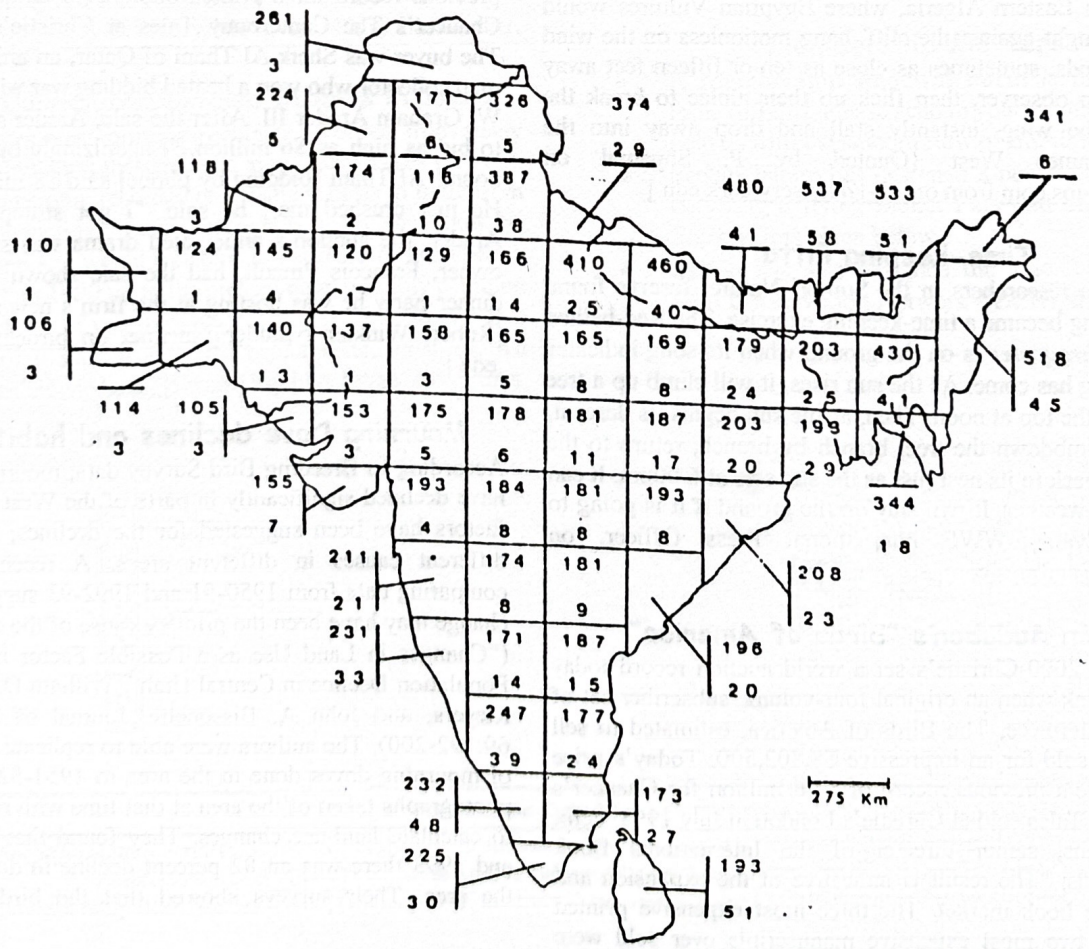
The report states that the model for industrialisation that India has adopted has its fair share of drawbacks. It has boosted the country's economic growth but has also resulted in grave air and water pollution besides land degradation.

This model, primarily borrowed from the West, presumed that raw materials would continue to be available in plenty at cheap rates either from own reserves or from the colonies of industrialised countries. Besides, the dependence on cheap but wasteful and outmoded imported technologies has created a "backlog" of pollution that is "truly staggering", the report states. The report lays renewed emphasis on judicious exploitation of resources so as to meet the requirements of growth in the long run. [Sagar, S.P. *in* Business Standard Thursday, June 10, 1999, quoted by Nalin, M on nathistory-india@lists.Princeton.edu]

Volunteers required

"Do you know of anybody who would be interested in doing line transects to sample large herbivores? Preferably a masters student but more important he should be interested in the stuff. I have a proposal to get an estimate of large mammals in the **BRT sanctuary Karnataka** for which I may require some person." [T. Ganesh. Email: tganesh@atree.org].

... Continued on page 7



LETTER FROM AN INSECT-HUNTING ORNITHOLOGIST—35

"BIOGEOGRAPHY is the study of the facts and patterns of species distribution. It's the science concerned with where animals are, where plants are, and where they are not. On the island of Madagascar, for instance, there once lived an ostrichlike creature that stood ten feet tall, weighed half a ton, and thumped across the landscape on a pair of elephantine legs. Yes, it was a bird...A thousand years ago, *Aepyornis maximus* existed only on that single island; now it exists nowhere. To say so is the business of biogeography.

"As practiced by thoughtful scientists, biogeography does more than ask *Which species*? and *Where*? It also asks *Why*? and, what is sometimes even more crucial, *Why not*?...

"Why, why not, why? These facts, and their explanations, represent biogeography. When the same sort of attention is focused specifically on islands, it becomes island biogeography.

"DURING those wet days in Sarawak at the start of 1855, Alfred Wallace wrote a scientific paper, "On the Law Which Has Regulated the Introduction of New species." Little known now and little read in his own time, it merits recognition as one of the historical landmarks of evolutionary biology...He sent the manuscript to London on a mail steamer, and by September it had been published in a good journal, *The Annals and Magazine of Natural History*. Wallace was proud of this paper, his first major attempt at conceptual biology. As months passed he waited expectantly, as a young writer or scientist will do, for reactions. From one friend he got a letter congratulating him lefthandedly...Otherwise, silence. Back in England, Charles Darwin read the paper in his own copy of the *Annals*, made some marginal scratches, took some notes...

"A few other scientists had taken notice of Wallace's paper, and two even said so to Darwin. One of these was Sir Charles Lyell, England's preeminent geologist. The other was Edward Blyth, an Englishman stationed in India with whom Darwin corresponded. But neither Lyell nor Blyth communicated appreciation to the author. To them, this fellow Wallace was an unknown, a commercial collector and trader, a purveyor of stuffed birds and mounted insects for the curio market. Collection was crucial to the advancement of biology, but if the collector sold specimens (as Wallace did, in order to live), he was liable to be looked on as diclassi. Furthermore, Wallace was still tramping his way from one island to the next all-hell-and-gone out in the Malay Archipelago. He had no social standing and no fixed address. Did anyone know how to reach him? Did anyone care? ...

"The punchline of Wallace's paper was:

"Every species has come into existence coincident both in space and in time with a pre-existing closely allied species.

"...Charles Darwin was a generation older, and had come back from an eye-opening journey aboard the *Beagle* twenty years earlier. Soon after returning, he had conceived his great theory...

"Darwin was a more ingenious theorist, admittedly. Hooker became the preeminent botanist of his time. Wallace, much later in life, involved himself in certain crankish interests...that have made it easier for historians to treat him unfairly. Still, Wallace remains the most heroically appealing, at least to my crankish taste. No doubt I'm biased by the fact that he, unlike Darwin and Hooker, was an impecunious freelancer.

"It started a few thousand years ago, when humans from Neolithic cultures along the fringes of the continents began venturing across the open sea in primitive boats. Colonizing remote islands such as Madagascar, New Zealand, New Caledonia, and the Hawaiian archipelago, the human invaders promptly killed off some endemic bird species...the European-inflicted insular extinctions were actually just a second phase of the larger process. The case of the dodo was only one of hundreds.

"From the time of the Neolithic voyages until the present, twenty percent of this world's bird species have gone extinct [an estimated 1.5 million species of birds have probably existed and evolved on earth—K.G.]. During recent centuries, the rate of extinction has increased further and the range of jeopardy has widened—from birds to animals and plants of all kinds, and from islands to continents—as humanity's impact has grown in direct correlation with the growth of human population, technological efficaciousness, and hubris. Nowadays it's not just a question of dodos and elephant birds and moas. Nowadays we are losing a little of everything.

"Within a few decades, if present trends continue, we'll be losing a lot of everything. As we extinguish a large portion of the planet's biological diversity, we will lose also a large portion of our world's beauty, complexity, intellectual interest, spiritual depth, and ecological health...

"What about you? Maybe you have read something, and maybe cared, about the extinction of species. Passenger pigeon, great auk, Steller's sea cow, Schomburgk's deer, sea mink, Antarctic wolf, Carolina parakeet: all gone. Maybe you know that human proliferation on this planet, and our voracious consumption of resources, and our large-scale transformations of landscape, are causing such a cataclysm of extinctions that bodes to be the worst such event since the fall of the dinosaurs...Maybe you stand among those well-informed people for whom the notion of catastrophic worldwide losses of biological diversity is a serious concern. Chances are, still, that you lack a few crucial pieces of the full picture." **[David Quammen, 1996, "*The Song of the Dodo: Island Biogeography in an Age of Extinctions*", pp. 12-13, 17, 20-21, 39-41, 606-607]**

"Chances are that you haven't caught wind of these scientific murmurs about ecosystem decay. Chances are that you know little or nothing about a seemingly marginal field called island biogeography." This is how the first chapter of the above book ends, continuing from the last line of the quotation above. During my latest teaching visit to the Pondicherry University 'School of Ecology and Environmental Sciences', I happened to leaf the pages of this unusually well-written and wonderful work that was adorning one of the shelves of Priya Davidar's bookcase at her flat. I quickly realized that the book was an unquestionable masterpiece of quality science journalism, and prose, and borrowed it for leisurely reading at my suburban Bangalore home. It is some 700 pages of enthralling and illuminating text, with some clear and 'old fashioned' maps by Kris Ellingsen, over 600 'Source Notes', a Bibliography of almost a

thousand titles, and a sumptuous Index spanning 28 pages. With an Indian Reprint Edition available for a little over three hundred rupees, all you intelligent and information-hungry bird watchers, and naturalists, should hasten to acquire this superbly written book which will thrill you like the stories of Ali Baba in the "Arabian Nights", with shades of Rudyard Kipling also filtering through some of its interesting pages. "Compulsively readable—a masterpiece, maybe *the* masterpiece of science journalism" wrote Bill McKibben in the *Audubon Magazine*, whose own eye-opening book, "The End of Nature" had come as a gift from my brother Shailendra, in 1989, on one of his home visits from the United States. Forget about, or postpone, purchasing one of the several 'good, bad or ugly' illustrated bird guides now flooding the amateur market—spend your money wisely on Quammen's spirited tale of extinctions, and of biogeography, and teach yourself much more than just bird identification and 'twitching'.

The map (*ex* Pearson & Cassola) of the Indian sub-continent (minus Burma) presented here (p. 2) gives the number of breeding (non-marine, non-aquatic species) birds so far known from each grid (top #) as well as the number of species of tiger beetles (Coleoptera: Cicindelidae) recorded in every square (bottom #), which is 275 km each way. Both taxa are fairly well documented from our region and therefore represent pretty well the biodiversity present in each squared area, almost authentically and completely. To get a better biogeographical picture of the distribution and abundance of our animal and plant diversity, it would be very revealing to superimpose this map on that of our biogeographical areas earlier included in my Letter 21 (*Pitta* # 93, January 1999), and acquire an understanding of so-called 'Hot Spots' of faunal and floral wealth in our sub-continent. It will be noticed that just three grids encompassing eastern Nepal, the Darjeeling—Sikkim highlands, Bhutan and Arunachal Pradesh contain by far the greatest diversity of life (not human, thankfully!) in this region. This is where speciation has run riot, or new ecosystems have been created, through a geological, ecological and evolutionary process, which have been 'invaded' by both true Indian and neighbouring Oriental and eastern Palaearctic elements. As we proceed from east to west along the great Himalayan ranges, the numbers decrease until the frontiers of what is now Afghanistan are reached. The map given here is again political and trigonometrical—other animals and plants do not recognize boundaries of human areas and culture, and we must understand this if we are to really comprehend Nature. The Indian sub-continent, as I know it from a naturalist's point of view, also includes and/or is influenced by what was and is present in the political units we now call eastern Iran, Afghanistan, Turkmenistan, Kazakhistan, Uzbekistan, Tadzikistan, Kirghizistan, Tibet, southwestern China (especially the Yunnan and Szechuan Provinces), Thailand and even the Malay peninsula and Sumatra which latter have also contributed to our Andaman and Nicobar Islands. It may be further emphasized that my concept of the "Indian sub-continent", in biogeographical parlance, most certainly includes Burma as well, and also the Maldive Islands and the Chagos Archipelago in the Indian Ocean. David Quammen's book, quoted above, may initiate in you the scent of biogeographical discovery, but to really educate yourself you must read and seek help to really understand this fascinating subject, which will give greater value to your bird watching pursuits, hopefully not restricted just to 'twitching or ticking' bird names, which, sadly, remain just that—names. Whether these are correct or misidentified does not bother most bird fanciers, but, unlike the currently applauded 'democratic' social system, Nature looks for selection of the peculiar, rather than the normal, at the individual and not merely the group or community. Two books are here recommended for the interested amateur or professional, one readily available but the other now reachable only in a few University libraries here: Cox & Moore's "*Biogeography: an ecological and evolutionary approach*" (5th edition, 1993), and that edited by M.S. Mani "*Ecology and Biogeography in India*" (1974).

Returning to the map reproduced here, you will notice that just TWO areas within our sub-continent hold our maximum biodiversity and these are disjunct, separated from each other by the expanse of northern (plains) and central India. The Himalayas which coalesce into what I term the Assam—Burma area have, by far, the most numerous plant and animal species so far sampled, named and documented here. The Western Ghats, thousands of kilometres to the south, dominate the peninsular Indian area with a wealth of biological diversity. Besides the Andaman & Nicobar Islands (which we will discuss later) these two mountain systems (including those on the island of Ceylon) make up all of the 'Hot Spots' recognized by conservationists in this part of the world, and these have influenced our thinking and helped sustain a prejudiced view that if we protect these two areas we will be doing well in conserving our biodiversity. My biogeographical Letters that will follow this year will be aimed at removing the sunglasses covering your 'jaundiced eye' and hopefully revealing to you what we are missing out on and what we must definitely also protect and conserve and restore if we are to be successful in preventing what was aptly termed "ecosystem decay" by Thomas Lovejoy (of the Smithsonian Institution), and also pointed out by David Quammen (pp. 11-12) so effectively as follows:

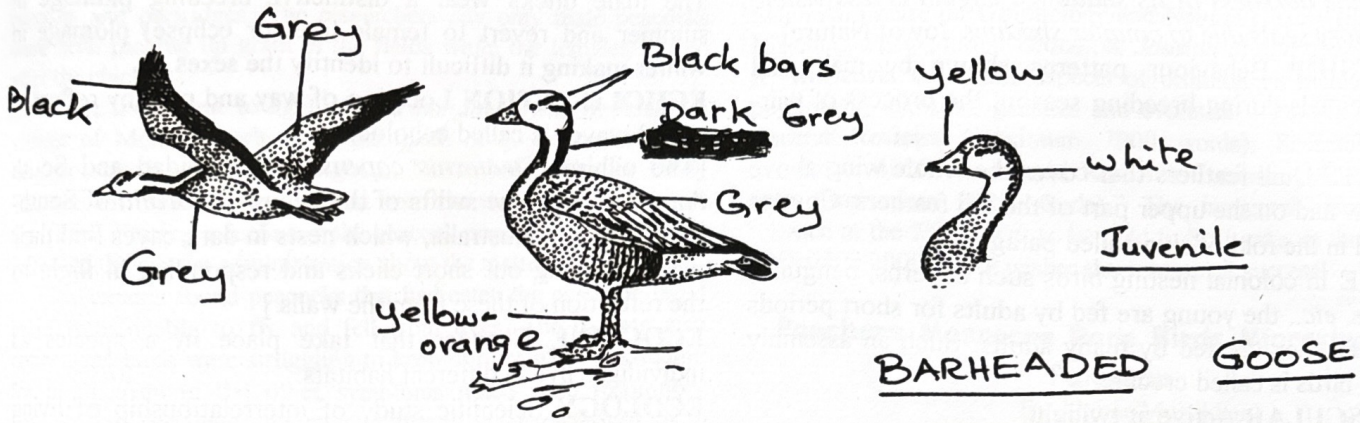
> "Lovejoy's term is loaded with historical resonance...His metaphor is more scientific in tone than mine of the sliced-apart Persian carpet. What he means is that an ecosystem—under certain specifiable conditions—loses diversity the way a mass of uranium sheds neutrons...
>
> "For the past thirty years, professional ecologists have been murmuring about the phenomenon of unraveling ecosystems. Many of these scientists have become mesmerized by the phenomenon and, increasingly with time, worried. They have tried to study it in the field, using mist nets and bird bands, box traps and radio collars, ketamine, methyl bromide, formalin, tweezers. They have tried to predict its course, using elaborate abstractions played out on their computers. A few have blanched at what they saw -- or thought they saw -- coming. They have disagreed with their colleagues about particulars, arguing fiercely in the scientific journals. Some have issued alarms, directed at governments or the general public, but those alarms have been broadly worded to spare nonscientific audiences the intricate, persuasive details. Others have rebutted the alarmism or, in some cases, issued converse alarms. Mainly these scientists have been talking to one another...
>
> "While the scientists have murmured, the general public has heard almost nothing. Faunal collapse? Relaxation to equilibrium? Even well-informed people with some fondness for the natural world have remained unaware that any such dark new idea is forcing itself on the world."

[**Errata:** Letter 34—*Pitta* #108, Page 3, Line 15 from bottom should read "[now in Pakistan—K.G.], Mysore,"; Page 4, Last line of quotation should read "**362-364**."]

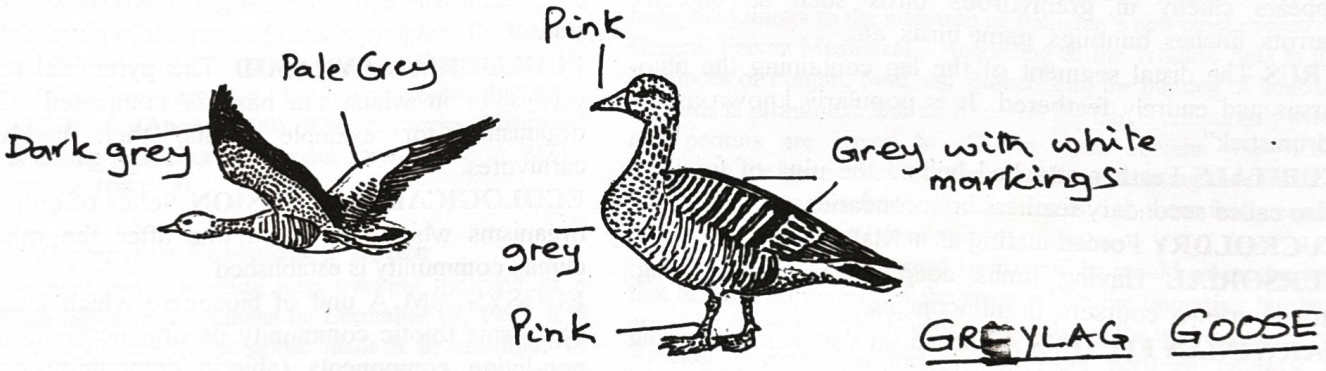
—Dr Kumar Ghorpadé, 1861 Bethel Street, Bangalore 560 043, India & varanus.kg@mailcity.com

FIELD CRAFT *By* Siraj Taher & Sachin Jaltare

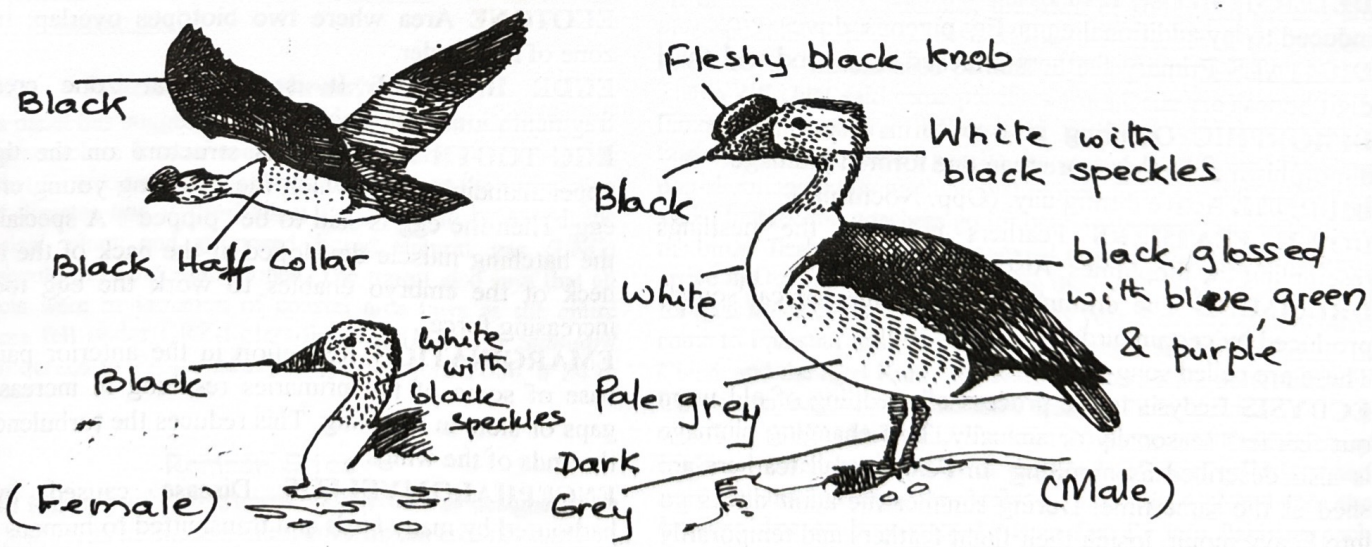
GEESE & DUCKS (Family: Anatidae): This is a very diverse and large group of waterbirds of varying sizes and colours, having flat beaks, webbed feet and short tails. These birds are mostly seen in large flocks or small parties. The regularity of their appearance between October and March every year throughout India on all types of inland water-bodies is a spectacular example of bird migration. Most species coming to A.P. are migratory, barring four.



BARHEADED GOOSE



GREYLAG GOOSE



COMB DUCK (NAKTA)

BIRD-*WORD*: A BIRDWATCHER'S LEXICON Compiled by S. Ashok Kumar

COUNTERSHADING Darker colour on the side that is turned towards light (back or top) and lighter hue on the opposite side (underside or belly). Countershading has thus survival value, deriving protection from camouflage. Also called obliterative shading. [*In water the dark back of a Penguin minimises reflection, the light coloured belly reduces the darkness of its shadow. Penguin is less visible to predatory seals due to counter shading.* Joy of Nature]

COURTSHIP Behaviour patterns shown by male and female animals during breeding season; the process of pair-formation.

COVERTS Quill feathers that cover the whole wing above and below and on the upper part of the tail feathers. Coverts are based in the fold of skin called patagium.

CRECHE In colonial nesting birds such as terns, penguins, flamingos, *etc*., the young are fed by adults for short periods after which they are fed by many adults. Such an assembly of young birds is called creche.

CREPUSCULAR Active at twilight.

CROP Enlarged portion of the lower end of the gullet (oesophagus) which functions as a storage chamber. Crop appears chiefly in granivorous birds such as pigeons, parrots, finches, buntings, game birds, *etc*.

CRUS The distal segment of the leg containing the tibio-tarsus and entirely feathered. It is popularly known as the "drumstick".

CUBITALS Feather attached behind the ulna of forearm. Also called secondary feathers or secondaries.

CUCKOLDRY Forced mating as in Mallards.

CURSORIAL Having limbs adapted for running. Eg: Stone-curlews, coursers, prantincole, *etc*.

DARWINIAN FITNESS An organism's success in passing on the genes to subsequent generations.

DETERMINATE LAYERS Birds which cannot be induced to lay additional eggs. Eg: pigeons, doves, *etc*.

DIGITALS Primary feathers attached to second and third digit bones.

DIMORPHIC Occuring in two forms especially sexual dimorphism or having more than one form of plumage.

DIURNAL Active during day. (Opp: Nocturnal).

DOWN FEATHERS Feathers covering the nestlings resembling the filoplumes. Also called plumules.

DRUMMING The drumming note or mechanical sounds produced by certain birds on the tree trunk.
These are called song-substitutes.

ECDYSIS Ecdysis is the process of shedding of old worn out feathers seasonally or annually. This changing plumage is also described as moulting. In Penguins all feathers are shed at the same time. During summer the adult ducks go into heavy moult, losing their flight feathers and temporarily becoming flight less. [Moult following the wear and tear of the breeding season and starting the bird off for migration is called post-nuptial moult. Moult in spring starting the bird out in a new suit for the coming breeding season is called pre-nuptial moult which is connected with the sexual display before breeding. The moult by which down feather is replaced by the juvenile plumage is called post natal moult. Migratory birds do not moult at the time of migration.]

ECLIPSE PLUMAGE The changed plumage after breeding season in birds, is described as eclipse plumage. The male ducks wear a distinctive breeding plumage in summer and revert to female like (or eclipse) plumage in winter making it difficult to identify the sexes.

ECHOLOCATION Location of way and prey by reflected sound waves is called echolocation.
[The oilbird (*Steatornis capensis*) of Trinidad and South America and some swifts of the genus *Collocalia* of South-East Asia and Australia; which nests in dark caves find their way by giving out short clicks and responding in flight to the reflection of these from the walls.]

ECOCLINE Changes that take place in a species as individuals live in different habitats.

ECOLOGY Scientific study of interrelationship of living organisms and their interactions with their environment.

ECOLOGICAL BALANCE The state of equilibrium in an ecosystem where different organisms co-exist in a stable state.

ECOLOGICAL PYRAMID The pyramidal structure of ecosystem in which the base is composed of producer organisms, for example plants, then herbivores and carnivores.

ECOLOGICAL SUCCESSION Series of communities of organisms which follow on one after the other, until a climax community is established

ECOSYSTEM A unit of biosphere which includes living organisms (biotic community or organic environment) and non-living components (abiotic community or inorganic environment) interacting.

ECOTONE Area where two biotopes overlap; transition zone of the border.

EGDE HABITAT It is a habitat zone created by fragmentation of the habitat.

EGG-TOOTH A calcareous structure on the tip of the upper mandible with which the maturing young cracks the egg. Then the egg is said to be "pipped". A special muscle, the hatching muscle developed at the back of the head and neck of the embryo enables to work the egg tooth with increasing force.

EMARGINATION Reduction in the anterior part of the base of some of the primaries resulting in increase in the gaps or slots in the wing. This reduces the turbulence round the ends of the wings.

ENCEPHALOMYELITIS Disease caused by virus harboured by many birds and transmitted to humans through mosquitoes, ticks, *etc*.

NOTES & News

More on Poisoned Peacocks

"...Researchers say that to protect their seeds from termite attacks, farmers—on advice from farm scientists—treat them with the insecticide *chloropyriphos* before sowing them. However, the seeds are not sown deep enough in the soil, and are left on the surface, where they are eaten by peacocks and other birds like pigeons and partridges. The researchers say only male peacocks were seen picking up grain in the fields while the females looked after the chicks.

"The issue came to light when a *mahant* (priest) at Rampura village of Mohindergarh noted the death of 13 peacocks in his neighbourhood within a fortnight in November-December 1999. The mahant realised that this had been the trend during the past few years. Fearing a decline in the peacock population, the mahant informed the district administration about the matter.

"...experts found peacocks that had eaten the pesticide-laced grain were unable to fly and fell from trees. The experts also noticed the birds were struggling to keep upright while seasrching for grain. Among the other symptoms noted were respiratory problems, excessive salivaion and diarrhoea characterised by a greenish white discharge. After the symptoms had set in, the birds died within 48 hours.

"...Viscera tests revcaled that thc wheat grain ingested by the birds had high levels of the pesticide *chloropyriphos*, the toxicity of which was cofirmed. The pestcide is an organophosphate and is known to get absorbed very fast, leading to severe diarrhoea, dehydration and death. [Anon (2000): P for pesticides. Misuse of insecticides is killing peacocks in Haryana. *Down to Earth*. 8(21): 19. See also *Pitta* # 108 p. 2]

Migrating Barheaded Goose

"A friend has sent me a satellite map tracking the path of a barheaded goose tagged at the Ghana on December 18, 1999. It is now in southwest China! ...The goose made it in less than 48 hours, in a dead straight line measuring some 400kms, right across Nepal." [Nirmal Ghosh tigerfire@yahoo.com on nathistory-india@lists.Princeton.edu]

Pulicat Lake threatened

An expert panel has suggested that the major industrial projects on the coastal stretch at Ennore near Chennai be scrapped. The panel reported that Ennore and its neighbourhood were on the verge of an ecological disaster and if the Pulicat Lake was to be saved, the petrochemical plant and proposed liquid natural gas (LNG) terminal should not be commissioned. The report also says that all the projects were in violation of coastal area laws as the entire Ennore area fell under CRZ-I classification. [*Business Standard* 3.iii.2000, quoted in *Protected Area Update* April 2000, # 24 p. 9.]

Ramsar Sites

The Union Ministry of environment and forests has designated 10 more wetland areas as Ramsar sites, covering an area of nearly 11 lakh hectares. The sites are Tse Morari (Jammu & Kashmir), Lali Sanctuary (Arunachal Pradesh), Dipor Beel (Assam), Pong Dam (Himachal Pradesh), Kabar Tal (Bihar), East Calcutta wetlands (West Bengal), Bhitarkanika Sanctuary (Orissa), Point Calimere Sanctuary (Tamil Nadu), Pulicat Lake (Tamil Nadu and Andhra Prdesh) and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. Ramsar sites are wetlands that are designated to be of global importance under an internaitonal agreement that was signed in Ramsar, Iran. [*Business Standard* 3.ii.2000, quoted in *Protected Area Update* April 2000, # 24 p. 10]

New Journal

Sálim Ali Centre for Ornithology and Natural History (**SACON**) is launching a new journal, *ORIOLUS, Journal of Asian Ornithology*. It "will cover the whole aspects of ornithology, including avian physiology, nutrition, genetics and evolution. The articles can be General Reviews (maximum 7000 words), Research articles (maximum 4000 words) and Research Communications or short notes (maximum 2000 words)." The inaugural issue will be released at the 2nd PASOC to be held in Sri Lanka, in the later part of October 2000. BSAP wishes the venture all success!

Poachers Massacre Rare Birds Migrating into Pakistan

By Ahmar Mustikhan

KARACHI, Pakistan, November 4, 1999 (ENS) - The massacre of endangered birds known as **houbara bustards** at the hands of poachers has prompted the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) to bring the killings to the attention of Pakistan's new chief executive, General Pervez Musharraf...According to the Wildlife Acts in the provinces of Punjab, Sind and Balochistan the hunting of houbara bustards is prohibited. But each season the ban is temporarily lifted and permits are issued to affluent Arab sheikhs who richly reimburse the government for the pleasure of hunting the rare bird. The previous government's justification is that these funds can be invested in welfare and development projects.

...Brig. Mukhtar Ahmed (retd) said he would ask authorities that at least 50 percent of the areas where the migrating bustards arrive be protected. The houbara bustards are the traditional prey of Arabian falconers as they fly in from northern latitudes to overwinter in Pakistan. Ahmed said he would specifically state that, "if under some compulsions, the head of states and princes are given permits, it may be ensured that the servants of the princely rulers do not misuse such permits or engage in meat collection." The WWF chief said some poachers from Qatar are now based in Tharparkar, and are "killing and catching not only houbara bustards but also desert gazelle, hares and even foxes. They are pop-shooting any living thing that moves, just for the fun of it," he said. Hunters and poachers go for houbara bustards as they believe the birds' flesh increases their sexual powers. The migratory birds arrive in October and after spending their winters in Pakistan leave for their home countries in March every year. Roughly 20,000 birds come to Pakistan from Urumchi and Kashgar areas of Sinkiang in China, and the Kyzl Kum, Tau Kum and Kara Kum desert areas of Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and some areas of Turkmenistan.

The WWF chief said, "At least 30 percent of the migratory birds get killed here, mostly at the hands of meat collectors and unethical hunters from the Arabian Gulf." He deplored that the baseline data on how many birds in fact fly into Pakistan each winter had not been compiled and there was no key for establishing sustainable hunting practice of the houbara bustards. Ahmed has information that at least seven parties from the Gulf states of UAE, Qatar and Bahrain are already busy hunting in the southeastern Sindh province. When he brought the matter to the notice of the officials concerned all of them drew a blank. The Environment

Ministry had informed him that no bustard permit has been issued to any Gulf ruler or prince as yet this year. "I personally communicated to the highest civil servant in Sindh, the chief secretary, besides the Sindh wildlife secretary, and the Sindh wildlife conservator, and also the director general of the Rangers Paramilitary Police but no one knew about the arrival of the Arab poachers. The presence of foreigners without any hunting permit is a very serious matter," the WWF chief said. Ahmed was astonished at how the landing of the poachers had gone unnoticed. "They take regular flights to come here and can easily be identified with the falcons they bring in with themselves. One wonders how they are not noticed by the Customs, Airport Security Force and Federal Investigation Agency?" Ahmed said.

To be legal, the hunters not only need a permit from the government of Pakistan, but also from their home countries as provided by international conservation laws. The WWF chief claims that the "smugglers, swindlers, and poachers" are killing and picking up the birds with the connivance of local big wigs in exchange for favours from the wealthy Arab guests. He will implore the authorities not to issue any permit for the Rojhan and Rajanpur areas in the Dera Ghazi Khan region of Punjab province. The migratory houbara bustards first arrive here, and then spread out to the south, east and northeast. Ahmed is also concerned about the Naag valley in the province of Balochistan, the breeding ground of a local houbara bustard species. "No permit should be given as the population has reached almost zero there," said Ahmed.

Ahmed, who also heads the Houbara Foundation, stressed that Pakistan is a party to three international agreements that protect endangered migratory birds such as the houbara bustard. [From Gargi.Choudhary@worldnet.att.net Thu Nov 11 05:19:15 1999. Environment News Service (ENS) <http://www.ens.lycos.com/> 1999. All Rights Reserved.]

BIRDING NOTES Compiled by Aasheesh Pittie

This column publishes birding notes in brief telegraphic form, from **Andhra Pradesh, Goa, Haryana, Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra, Punjab, Rajasthan & Tamil Nadu** on interesting and significant sightings and behaviour like breeding, feeding, migration, nesting, *etc*. Notes on flowering and fruiting trees and their relationship with birds are also welcome. English names and classification follow, S.D. Ripley's *A Synopsis of the Birds of India and Pakistan* (1982, 2nd ed.) and scientific nomenclature, T. Inskipp, N. Lindsey & W. Duckworth's *An Annotated Checklist of the Birds of the Oriental Region* (1996). Unless specified, all observations are for 2000. Abbreviations, Contributors, Notes, Regional Referees, *etc.*, are at the end. For selection of breeding criteria 'Probable, Possible, Confirmed', see *Pitta* # 82, February 1998, p. 4.

ANDHRA PRADESH

RANGAREDDI DISTRICT

Anantagiri 16.iv.2000 (AE)

WHITEBELLIED DRONGO 1; LARGE CUCKOO-SHRIKE 1; BLUEHEADED ROCK THRUSH 1M; YELLOWTHROATED SPARROW 3.

ABBREVIATIONS: Ab-abundant; ad-adult/s; br-breeding; C-common/ly; CB-confirmed breeding; const-construction/ing; *c.*-approximately; disp-display/ing; F-female; flt-flight; fly-family; freq-frequent/ly; hrd-heard; id-identify/ied; imm-immature; inc-include/ing; Is-Island; juv-juvenile; LM-local migrant; M-male; mat-material; N-nest/ing/s; POB-possible breeding; PRB-probable breeding; plm-plumage; RF-Reserve Forest; Resp-respectively; Tlk-Taluk; vil-village; WL-wildlife; yng-young.

CONTRIBUTORS: Amitabh Epur (AE).

REGIONAL REFEREES: Andhra Pradesh: Aasheesh Pittie; Goa: Heinz Lainer; Haryana: Harkirat S. Sangha; Karnataka: J.N. Prasad; Kerala: P.O. Nameer; Maharashtra: Nitin Jamdar; Punjab: H.S. Sangha; Rajasthan: H.S. Sangha; Tamil Nadu: V. Santharam.

CONTACT CALLS

"With reference to a report by A. M. K.Bharose on **Black Stork** ***Ciconia nigra*** in **Madhya Pradesh**, we have to add that a single black stork was seen on a small water pool in Ranthambhore Tiger Reserve on 13.ii.2000. A local guide said that there are 8-10 black storks in the forest and every year they visit Ranthambhore." —BM Parasharya, CK Borad & Aeshita Mukherjee, Gujarat.

"This has reference to the column *Spotlight*, **Lesser Adjutant** appearing in *Pitta* 101, September 1999...In the state of Madhya Pradesh, Kanha NP has been shown, where the species has been recorded, but not the Bandhavgarh NP, which is situated in Umaria Distt., of Rewa area...During my last two visits to this park, the species was sighted, both the times, as described below:

2nd January 1999—A solitary bird was seen in Charanganga River, before Chakradhara area.

22nd May 1999—In all 11 birds seen in Chakradhara area, in two rounds, on the same day.

23rd May 1999—A solitary bird in Bathan area.

The above details comfirm occurrence of the species in the Bandhavgarh NP as well."

—A.M.K. Bharos, Chhattisgarh Wildlife Society, Raipur, Madhya Pradesh.

"There is an error in "Grey **Pelicans** breeding at **Uppalapadu**" in *Pitta* #108 page 8, pertaining to the number of **Painted Storks** visiting the tank. This should be 350 (not 3,500)." [Editors' note: The error is regretted.] —K. Mrutyumjaya Rao, Kakinada, Andhra Pradesh

For Private Circulation Only

For information, write to: Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh, PO Box 45, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad 500034, India.

Editors: Aasheesh Pittie (3350683) & Siraj A Taher (6572608) **E-mail**: aasheesh@hd1.vsnl.net.in

Membership (Rs): Admission=20; Ordinary=100, Student=25 per annum; Life=1,000. *Outstation cheques not accepted.*

Editors' Note: "Spotlight" will appear in *Pitta* # 110.

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PITTA

Bulletin of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh No 111: July 2000

PROGRAMME

FIELD OUTING: 23-vii-2000: Umamaheshwaram, Mahbubnagar District: A 15-seater Matador van will leave from Shanbhag Hotel, Panjagutta X Roads, at 7am *sharp*. There will be a halt for breakfast before Dindi Reservoir. After birding at Dindi Reservoir we will proceed to Umamaheshwaram. The journey will take about 3½ hours. We will return by 8pm the same evening. The cost of the trip will be Rs200/- per person, for those who travel in the van. Registrations, on a first-cum-first-served basis, end on 18.vii.2000. Members may come by themselves also. Those willing to car-pool should inform in advance. Please assemble near Shanbhag hotel, by 6.45am. Please carry lunch and drinking water. For registration *etc.*, please contact Siraj Taher (6612608) / Aasheesh Pittie (3350683/6501535) before 11am or after 4pm. 6612608

MEETING: 17-vii-2000, 6 p.m.: Discussion on annual trip to Rollapadu Bustard Sanctuary. Vidyaranya High School, Opp., Secretariat, Saifabad, Hyderabad.

NOTES & NEWS

BSAP CAMP AT ROLLAPADU BUSTARD SANCTUARY

A camp for two batches is being arranged at Rollapadu Bustard Sanctuary (Kurnool District) from 13-15 and 20-22 August 2000. Each batch will consist of 25 participants whose place will be registered on a first-come-first-served basis. The groups will depart from Shanbhag Hotel, Panjagutta X Roads at 7am sharp on 13th / 20th morning and return to the same place by 8pm on 15th / 22nd. Registration charges are Rs650/- per person. Contact Aasheesh Pittie (3350683) / Siraj Taher (6612608) for bookings and details. Participants will carry out census of Great Indian Bustard, Blackbuck and Indian Wolf during their stay, besides general birding. Simple vegetarian food will be served. Dormitory-type accomodation is available. Personal equipment like binoculars, cameras, *etc.*, will be owner's responsibility.

A Trip to Rollapadu Bustard Sanctuary

Siraj A. Taher

It started as a business trip to Kurnool for two of our members, Shafaat Ulla and Jagdish, but ended up as an interesting and successful visit to the Rollapadu Bustard Sanctuary for Humayun and me also. Despite blistering heat of 44°C, dry weather and objections from friends and family we went and at the end of the trip, every trouble and effort were worth it. The morning of 29th April was cool and pleasant when we started at 6.30 in the morning. But by the time it became hot, we were at Jadcherla. A quick breakfast and we were on to Kurnool. Even though we were well stocked with water and caps, it was quite uncomfortable in the jeep but both the company of friends as well as the conversation was interesting. En-route it was the usual birds in the dry flat terrain, dry fields and rocky grasslands. We noted black drongos, ring dove, cattle egrets, house crows, pariah kites and common mynas. Near a large roadside banyan tree a whitebreasted kingfisher made a noisy appearance while a pied kingfisher was sitting on a branch overlooking a small pool. On the way, about 40km before Kurnool town there was a tank a little away from the roadside. Going closer we were rewarded with a wonderful sight of several waterbirds—cotton teal (20+), lesser whistling teals, little and large cormorants, coots, spotbill ducks, dabchicks, cattle egrets, median egrets (2) and best of all, two darters. This tank we were told is known as Lachchamma Cheruvu and is in Mahbubnagar District.

On reaching Kurnool we made a short halt for lunch and rest and left around 3pm, reaching Rollapadu at 5pm. The Forest Department staff knew about our visit and after settling down in the room arranged for us we took a forest watcher for a trip into the sanctuary. Though we did not see any bustards or floricans, there were several small groups of blackbucks grazing. The only bustard we saw that day was an orphan female that the staff had reared in the Environmental Education Centre premises. Quite tame, it was hawking insects and feeding all over the place and even allowed Humayun to take a few minutes of video. Two pairs of spotted owlets had nests in holes under the eaves and the forest watchers told us that there are 6 young birds in the nests.

Early next morning we took two forest watchers with us to the grassland areas to see the great Indian bustard (GIB) and the florican if possible. They had been seeing 4-5 GIBs for the past week and were hopeful of showing them to us. Sure enough, within a short time we could sight 2 females in a patch of grass. There was great excitement all around. Binoculars were trained towards the birds in no

time. Going further into the core area, a male GIB was seen on a 'lek' (a small mound) displaying and strutting. Even though no females could be seen he seemed to be sure that some were sure to see him. He was not wrong, for soon a female flew in from an adjoining patch of grass. Now he went into a most rapturous display of male 'chauvinism', — strutting, spreading his wings, the head thrown back, the throat and neck swollen and the gular pouch extended and almost touching the ground. One more female came in but soon departed. We were all fascinated by the displaying male and four females in close proximity.

Subsequently we saw one more female some distance away in another patch of grass and a second male flying in. In total we saw 7 bustards, 2 males and 5 females. The guards told us about an eagle's nest on a tree in another spot and on checking up we found a short-toed eagle nesting on a neem tree and there was a nestling being fed with a small snake!

There were several herds of blackbuck all over the sanctuary, but neither floricans nor wolves could be spotted. Leaving Rollapadu around 1pm we reached Hyderabad by about 6pm. The return journey was uneventful except for six openbill storks seen in flight and 40+ pariah kites flying over a dump near a poultry farm. Two whitebacked vultures were also seen en-route. So ended a momentous outing for all of us. We are grateful to the officers and staff of the A.P. Forest Department for making it so convenient for us.

"**House sparrows** successfully followed man to many parts of the world. Range has been extended by introductions in north and South America, southern Africa, Australia and New Zealand. An interesting situation has developed between north and South America where house sparrow populations are on the point of meeting up again after a separation of some 150 years.

"Quite remarkable were the sparrows breeding in a south Yorkshire colliery and fed by the miners 700ft below ground level. The Falklands were colonised by house sparrows travelling aboard a fleet of whalers from Uruguay.

"The present decline in house sparrow numbers appears to be widespread over much of western Europe. Many reasons have been suggested including the widespread use of garden pesticides resulting in an absence of insects needed by newborn sparrows.

"The disappearance of chickens in many farmyards and back gardens must have reduced the availability of food. Domestic cats are abundant nowadays, and tawny owls and sparrowhawks may be additional factors." [By Michael J. Seago, quoted on bngbirds@onelist.com]

A couple of nights ago it was shown on Danish television how a pair of **Barn Swallows** had tought themselves to operate a very large garagedoor.

The workers at a factory had been wondering how the 10 by 8 foot door seemingly opened by itself every now and then. A guard was called, and while he was looking, suddenly the door slowly swung up. Nobody went in or out. It took a while for the guys to figure out why, and a crew from the televison was called.

It was filmed (at different angles and slow motion) that the Barn Swallow hovered right in front of the electronic eye and cut the infrared beam. As soon as the door began to move, the Swallow swooped down and under the door to get to the nest inside the large garage to feed the chicks.

It performed this trick so elegantly. Came flying in with insects, hovered a second or two, and Open Sesame, the door opened.

I wonder how this little bird has been able to make the connection cutting an invisible light beam some three or four feet above the ground? It clearly flew to the same spot very close to the electronic eye each time.

I will not call it intelligence, but it surely was not born knowing about high tech, was it?

[Ole Post, Hillerod, Denmark, on BIRDCHAT@LISTSERV.ARIZONA.EDU]

In 1999, Goose and Swan Study Group of Eastern Europe and North Asia launched the Project "Investigation of Dynamics of the Numbers and Range of the **Ruddy Shelduck** ***Tadorna ferruginea*** in the 20th century". We would highly appreciate cooperation with everybody studying the species or possessing any data on its occasional observations (expert ornithologists as well as birdwatchers).

If you have any data on the Ruddy Shelducks, please, fill in this questionnaire and return it to:

Anastasia Popovkina, Project Coordinator, Dept. Vertebrate Zoology, Biol. Faculty, Moscow State University, Moscow 119899 Russia. Tel. (095) 939 2757; fax (095) 952 3007. E-mail: nastya@soil.msu.ru

Questionnaire:

1. Surveyed area (as detailed as possible: landscape and vegetation description, approximate area, borders; maps are desirable)
2. Dates and time of survey.
3. Means of survey (aerial, from water, terrestrial, *etc.*).
4. Bird numbers (for males, females, and young birds (pull., juv., subad.) separately, if such data is available).
5. Bird status (nesting, wintering, migrating, moulting, *etc.*).
6. Ringing (its time, the number of ringed birds, known ring recoveries - if Ruddy Shelducks have been ever ringed in the surveyed area).

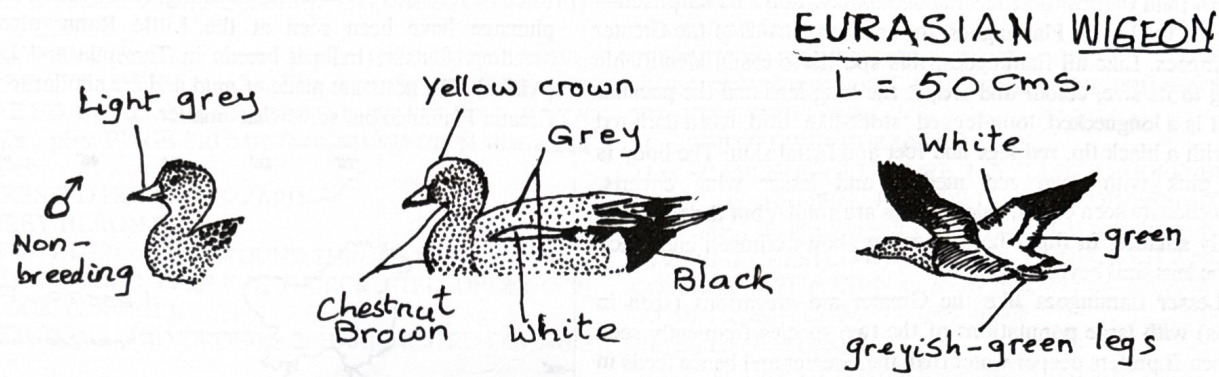
If you have any data referring to the previous years, please note changes in the birds' numbers and distribution.

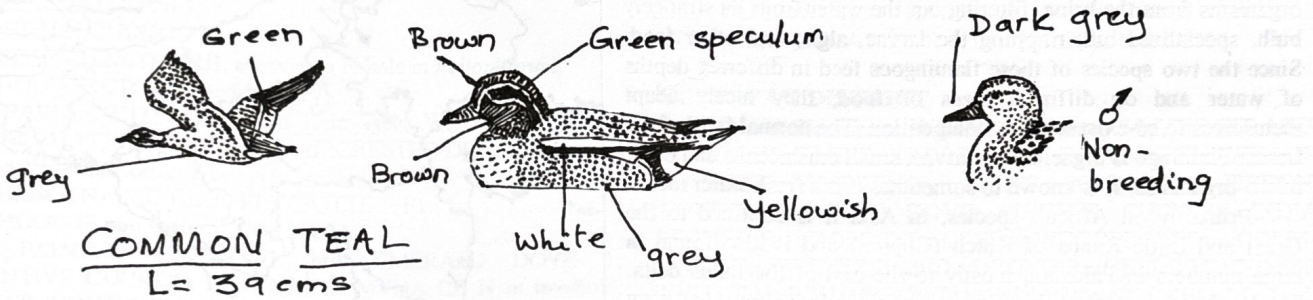
Any additional information (on reproductive biology, behaviour, etc.) is also of great value.

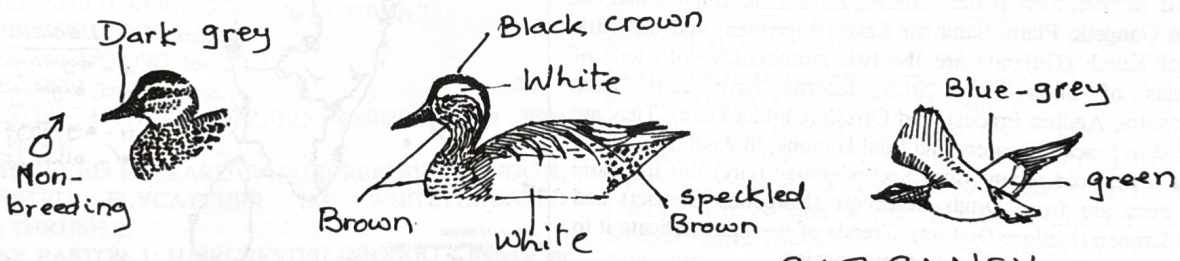
You are welcome to submit a paper on this item to "Casarca", the Journal of the Goose and Swan Study Group of Eastern Europe and North Asia (in English or in Russian, volume is unlimited). Thank you for cooperation! [Anastasia Popovkina, Project Coordinator (contributed by Taej Mundkur on orientalbirding@egroups.com)]

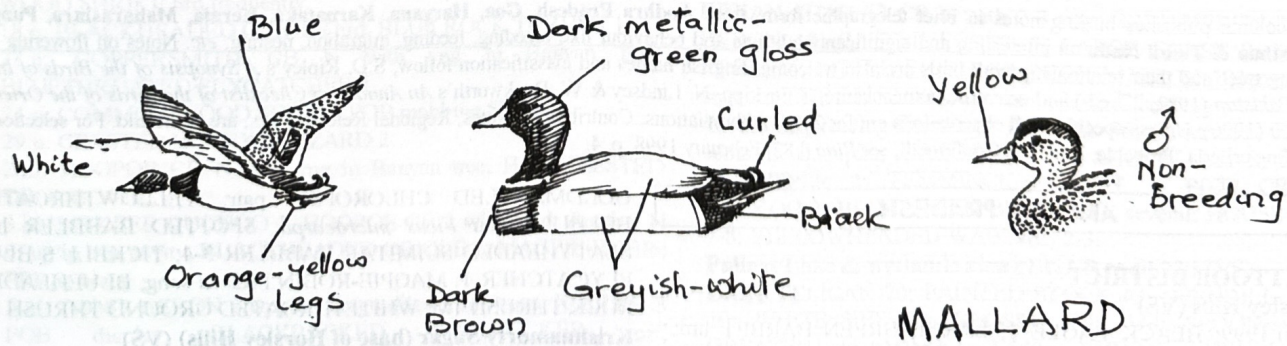
FIELD CRAFT *By* Siraj Taher & Sachin Jaltare

GEESE & DUCKS (Family: Anatidae): This is a very diverse and large group of waterbirds of varying sizes and colours, having flat beaks, webbed feet and short tails. These birds are mostly seen in large flocks or small parties. The regularity of their appearance between October and March every year throughout India on all types of inland water-bodies is a spectacular example of bird migration. Most species coming to A.P. are migratory, barring four.









SPOTLIGHT: Lesser Flamingo *Phoeniconaias minor* By Siraj A. Taher

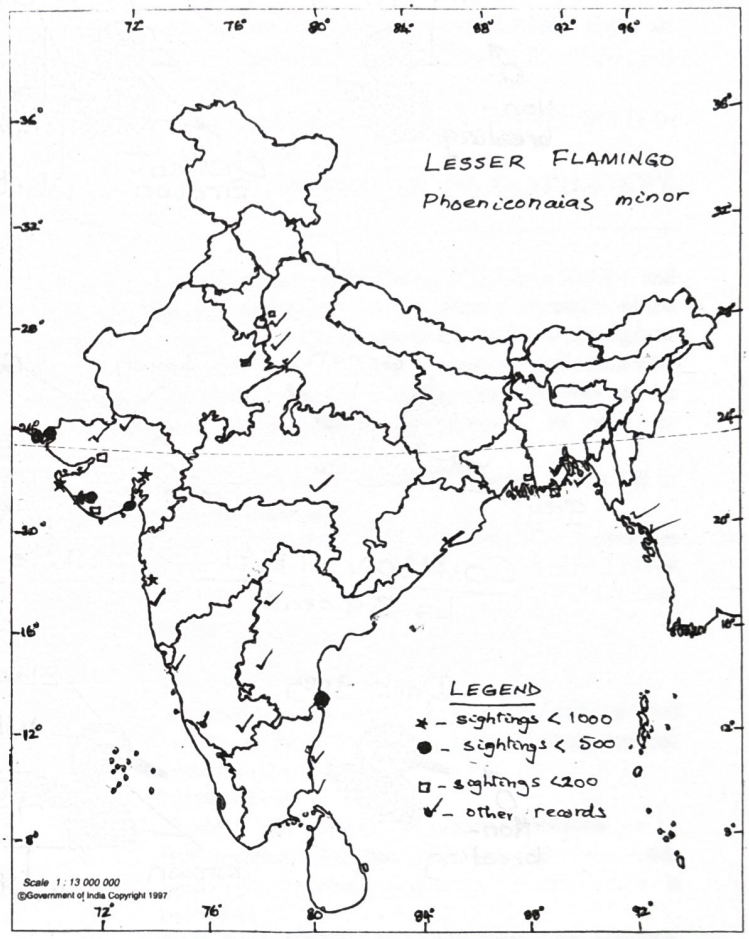
This column focuses on birds that are in the Red Data Book of BirdLife International as threatened / highly threatened species. Readers are requested to send information about these birds to the Society.

If amongst a huge flock of flamingoes spread all over the Little Rann of Kutch (Gujarat) you see some groups of flamingoes, more pinkish than the rest and feeding separately, don't be surpirsed— these are the Lesser Flamingoes, the smaller cousins of the Greater Flamingoes. Like all flamingoes, this species is easily identifiable owing to its size, colour and shape, the long legs and the peculiar bill. It is a longnecked, long-legged 'stork-like' bird, has a dark red bill with a black tip, red legs and feet and facial skin. The body is pale pink with deep red median and lesser wing coverts, conspicuously seen on the sides. Sexes are similar but the female is slightly smaller. In flight he underwing shows crimson and black and the legs trail beyond the tail.

Lesser flamingoes like the Greater are gregarious (seen in groups) with large populations of the two species frequently seen together. It prefers deeper water than the Greater and hence feeds in higher concentration of salt waters. When the food is short, it has been seen to feed in shallow waters too. Wallking and swimming, with a scything movement of its head, it sucks in algae and micro-organisms from the brine, filtering out the water from its strangely built, specialized bill, trapping the larvae, algae and other food. Since the two species of these flamingoes feed in different depths of water and on diffreent sizes of food, they nicely adapt themselves to co-exist without competition. The normal food of the Lesser Flamingo is algae, insect larvae, small crustaceans and other micro-organisms. It is known to sometimes drink fresh water too.

Primarily an African species, in Asia it is confined to the Great and Little Ranns of Kutch (Gujarat) and is also found in large numbers in Pakistan, mostly to the east of the Indus delta. The local movements of this bird are erratic in India but it has been recorded in northwest o the country, Rajasthan, Gujarat and the western Gangetic Plain. Sambhar Lake (Rajasthan) and the Little Rann of Kutch (Gujarat) are the two strongholds with tens of thousands of birds seen. Stray records have come from Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh and Orissa (Chilika Lake). They are restricted to brackish waters and tidal lagoons. In Andhra Pradesh, there is a very old record from Secunderabad (city) but the more recent ones are from Dindi Reservoir (Nalgonda District) and Pulicat Lagoon (Nellore District). Trends of its status indicate it to be stable but in South India it is a rare species.

Though not known to breed in India, young and nests have been noted in the Greater Rann of Kutch in 1974 by Sálim Ali when he recorded 300-400 nests/young. Also, young ones in brown plumage have been seen at the Little Rann, also indicating breeding. Outside India it breeds in Tanzania and Lake Nakuru (Africa). The nests are made of mud and are similar to those of the Greater Flamingo but somewhat smaller.



BIRDING NOTES Compiled by Aasheesh Pittie

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ANDHRA PRADESH

CHITTOOR DISTRICT

Horsley Hills (VS)

12.xii.1999: BLACK EAGLE 1; LARGE GREEN BARBET hrd; SLATYHEADED SCIMITAR BABBLER hrd.

20.ii.2000: KESTREL 1; GREY JUNGLEFOWL 3-4; BLACKHEADED ORIOLE hrd; HAIRCRESTED DRONGO hrd; GOLDMANTLED CHLOROPSIS pair; YELLOWTHROATED BULBUL 2 on *Ficus microcarpa*; SPOTTED BABBLER hrd; SLATYHEADED SCIMITAR BABBLER 3-4; TICKELL'S BLUE FLYCATCHER 1; MAGPIE-ROBIN PRB in song; BLUEHEADED ROCK THRUSH 1M; WHITETHROATED GROUND THRUSH 1.

Krishnamurty Sagar (base of Horsley Hills) (VS)

26.xii.1999: BLACK EAGLE 1; SHORT-TOED EAGLE 2; SMALL GREENBILLED MALKOHA 5+; LARGE GREEN BARBET hrd;

RUFOUSBACKED SHRIKE 5-6; WHITEBELLIED DRONGO 4; BRAHMINY MYNA 2; YELLOWTHROATED BULBUL 2; SLATYHEADED SCIMITAR BABBLER hrd; VERDITER FLYCATCHER 2; WHITESPOTTED FANTAIL FLYCATCHER 1; SHAMA 1hrd; PURPLE SUNBIRD M in eclipse plm.

Rishi Valley (VS)

23-30.xi.1999: GREAT HORNED OWL hrd; COPPERSMITH PRB, excavating N-hole in dead *Peltophorum*; HAIRCRESTED DRONGO hrd; REDBREASTED FLYCATCHER 5-6; BLUETHROATED FLYCATCHER hrd.

5.xii: KESTREL F mobbing Tawny Eagle; GREY JUNGLEFOWL hrd; EMERALD DOVE 1; LARGE GREEN BARBET hrd; WIRETAILED SWALLOW 6-8; BOOTED WARBLER 1; BAYA 50+ non-br., plm; PURPLERUMPED SUNBIRD CB N in a social spider's web.

10.xii: CRESTED HONEY BUZZARD.

11.xii: GREY HERON 1.

16.xii: WHITETHROATED GROUND THRUSH 1.

25xii: SHORT-TOED EAGLE 1; HAIRCRESTED DRONGO 2; BLUE ROCK THRUSH 1.

31.xii: WHITEBELLIED DRONGO 2; HARICRESTED DRONGO 3-4.

2.i.2000: PLAINTIVE CUCKOO F in hepatic phase; GOLDEN ORIOLE feeding on insects 2' up in crops.

3.i: EMERALD DOVE 1; VERDITER FLYCATCHER 1.

5.i: EMERALD DOVE 1.

11.i: INDIAN CUCKOO 1.

13.i: COPPERSMITH PRB, excavating N-hole in *Peltophorum*.

17.i: HOOPOE CB with food in bill.

20.i: PARIAH KITE CB N on Rain Tree; WHITEBREASTED WATERHEN PRB 2 birds disp? HAIRCRESTED DRONGO feeding on nectar of Silk Cotton Tree.

27.i: BLACKNAPED BLUE FLYCATCHER F1.

28.i: HOOPOE pair carrying food in beak.

30.i: PAINTED SPURFOWL hrd; EMERALD DOVE 1; PLAINTIVE CUCKOO 1; COMMON MYNA CB N in tree-hole; LESSER WHITETHROAT 3-4; MAGPIE-ROBIN POB 1M singing; WHITETHROATED GROUND THRUSH 1; BAYA 2.

31.i: INDIAN ROBIN POB singing.

7.ii: BROWN WOOD OWL hrd 2.

8.ii: SHIKRA POB pair courting.

9.ii: CRESTED HONEY BUZZARD; COPPERSMITH PRB excavating N-hole.

12.ii: WHITE-EYED BUZZARD 1; HAIRCRESTED DRONGO 4; REDBREASTED FLYCATCHER 1M; WHITETHROATED GROUND THRUSH 2.

13.ii: ROSY PASTOR 1; HAIRCRESTED DRONGO 2 feeding on nectar of *Prosopis juliflora*.

16.ii: BLACKBACKED WOODPECKER hrd.

17.ii: BLACKHEADED ORIOLE on fruiting *Ficus*; COMMON WOOD SHRIKE hrd frequently.

18.ii: BLACKHEADED ORIOLE hrd; BLUE ROCK THRUSH 1.

23.ii: COPPERSMITH CB N with yng in Banyan tree; BLUETHROATED FLYCATCHER 1.

24.ii: COMMON WOOD SHRIKE POB mobbing Shikra.

29.ii: CRESTED HONEY BUZZARD 2.

2.iii: HOOPOE CB N with yng in Banyan tree; HAIRCRESTED DRONGO hrd.

3.iii: SIRKEER CUCKOO 1; HOOPOE CB 2 with food. Another N 6' up in tree cavity; BLACKHEADED ORIOLE 1; MAGPIE-ROBIN PRB in song.

5.iii: POND HERON snapping dragonflies from trees; ROLLER 3 POB display; BLACKBACKED WOODPECKER pair; GOLDMANTLED CHLOROPSIS pair at *Loranthus* flowers; SPOTTED MUNIA 50-60.

13.iii: HOOPOE CB feeding yng on Tamarind tree.

17.iii: SHIKRA hrd, carrying N-mat., to N on *Peltophorum* tree.

18.iii: SIRKEER CUCKOO PRB carrying food into *Acacia* tree; BROWN FISH OWL CB N on rock ledge with 1 yng; BLUE ROCK THRUSH 1; PURPLE SUNBIRD PRB M in song.

19.iii: SIRKEER CUCKOO PRB a pair; YELLOW-EYED BABBLER 1; INDIAN ROBIN CB with food in bill; PIED BUSHCHAT POB singing;

25.iii: LITTLE BROWN DOVE PRB displaying.

26.iii: BROWN FISH-OWL 1; JUNGLE CROW PRB with N-mat.

20.v: KOEL PRB in song.

21.v: WHITE-EYED BUZZARD 1.

22.v: SCAVENGER VULTURE 1; YELLOWLEGGED BUTTON-QUAIL 1; BROWN FISH-OWL hrd; COPPERSMITH PRB displaying; PURPLERUMPED SUNBIRD CB N with 1 yng.

26.v: PIED CRESTED CUCKOO hrd; HOOPOE CB 2 ad., 2 yng; COMMON MYNA CB N in *Ficus* tree, ad., bringing food for yng; INDIAN ROBIN CB M with food in bill.

Vayalpad Hills (VS)

27.ii.2000: CRESTED HAWK-EAGLE 1 hrd; BLOSSOMHEADED PARAKEET hrd; PALM SWIFT 4-5; WHITEBREASTED KINGFISHER POB display? RUFOUSBACKED SHRIKE 5-6 noisy; BRAHMINY MYNA few; YELLOWTHROATED BULBUL hrd; YELLOWEYED BABBLER 3-4; JUNGLE BABBLER; VERDITER FLYCATCHER 1; BLUE ROCK THRUSH 1.

CUDDAPAH DISTRICT

Sri Lankamalleshwara Wildlife Sanctuary 25-27.iii (HT, MKP)

BONELLI'S EAGLE; TAWNY EAGLE; PEAFOWL; YELLOW-WATTLED LAPWING; STONE CURLEW; JERDON'S COURSER 1; RING DOVE; SIRKEER CUCKOO; INDIAN NIGHTJAR; GOLDENBACKED WOODPECKER; GOLDEN ORIOLE; WHITEBELLIED DRONGO; YELLOWTHROATED BULBUL; WHITEBROWED BULBUL; TICKELL'S BLUE FLYCATCHER; GREY TIT; YELLOWTHROATED SPARROW.

KURNOOL DISTRICT

Rollapadu Bustard Sanctuary 29-30.iv (MSU; JK; HT; SAT)

SHORT-TOED EAGLE CB N with 1 yng; GREAT INDIAN BUSTARD PRB 2M (1 disp), 5F; YELLOW-WATTLED LAPWING; MARSH SANDPIPER; SPOTTED SANDPIPER; INDIAN COURSER 8; INDIAN SANDGROUSE 14; SPOTTED OWLET CB N with 3 yng; RUFOUSTAILED FINCH-LARK; SYKES' CRESTED LARK 5; GREY SHRIKE C; PADDYFIELD PIPIT PRB carrying insect in beak.

NELLORE DISTRICT

Nelapattu Bird Sanctuary 23.i (VS)

INDIAN SHAG 13 CB N with 2-3 yng; GREY HERON 2; POND HERON 49; CATTLE EGRET 5; LARGE EGRET 8; MEDIAN EGRET 4; LITTLE EGRET 10; NIGHT HERON 101 no N, juv., seen; OPENBILL STORK 200 incl., juv., & nestlings; WHITE IBIS 46 CB ad., feeding fledglings; PINTAIL 36; COMMON TEAL 77 some in br., plm; GARGANEY 22; SHOVELLER 8; MARSH SANDPIPER 2; TEMMINCK'S STINT 1; PIED CRESTED CUCKOO 1; BLUETAILED BEE-EATER several; HOUSE CROW 7-8; YELLOWHEADED WAGTAIL 2-3.

Pulicat Lake & wetlands along SHAR road 23.i (VS)

GREY PELICAN 70; PAINTED STORK 43; OPENBILL STORK 10; WHITE IBIS 32; GLOSSY IBIS 144; SPOONBILL 10; GREATER FLAMINGO 1,500; RUDDY SHELDUCK 3; SPOTBILLED DUCK 1; GARGANEY 320; SHOVELLER 150;

UNIDENTIFIED DUCKS 2,800; SHORT-TOED EAGLE 1; PEREGRINE FALCON 1; COOT 200; PACIFIC GOLDEN PLOVER 100; CURLEW 26; BLACKTAILED GODWIT 105; RUFF 2; COLLARED SAND MARTIN 2-3; CLAMOROUS REED WARBLER 2-3; WHITETHROATED MUNIA 2.

KARNATAKA

BANGALORE DISTRICT
Kaggalipura 14.v (UHK, UR, UPA, AS, SB, MBK, AmP)
BLACK DRONGO CB N with 2 yng.

TAMIL NADU

NIGLIRIS DISTRICT (JNP)
Coonoor: Sim's Park 27.iv
REDWHISKERED BULBUL PRB N under const. *c.* 2m up on a hedge.
Dodda Betta 27.iv
REDWHISKERED BULBUL PRB with N-mat; NILGIRI LAUGHING THRUSH 4 at 8760'.
Udhagamandalam 27.iv
JUNGLE MYNA CB carrying foodd in N under tiled roof.
Udhagamandalam Botanical Garden 27.iv
JUNGLE MYNA CB ad., carrying food; GREY TIT CB pair feeding 2 fledgelings; SPOTTED MUNIA PRB carrying N-mat., to a N *c.* 10m up; WHITE-EYE feeding on nectar of Bottle Brush *Calistomon lanceolatum* flowers.

ABBREVIATIONS: Ab-abundant; ad-adult/s; br-breeding; C-common/ly; CB-confirmed breeding; const-construction/ing; *c.*-approximately; disp-display/ing; F-female; flt-flight; fly-family; freq-frequent/ly; hrd-heard; id-identify/ied; imm-immature; inc-include/ing; Is-Island; juv-juvenile; LM-local migrant; M-male; mat-material; N-nest/ing/s; POB-possible breeding; PRB-probable breeding; plm-plumage; RF-Reserve Forest; Resp-respectively; Tlk-Taluk; vil-village; WL-wildlife; yng-young.
CONTRIBUTORS: Amitabh Poddar (AmP); Arpana Srivatsa (AS); Humayun Taher (HT); Jagdish Kumar (JK); M. Shafaat Ulla (MSU); MB Krishna (MBK); MK Prasad (MKP); Sanjay Balachandran (SB); Siraj A Taher (SAT); U.Harish Kumar (UHK); Ullas PA (UPA); Usha Ramaiah (UR); V. Santharam (VS).
NOTES: [1] No Grey Pelicans seen. [2] Approaching N., boldly. [3] In a 3min span the pair made 5 sorties & carried feather, rootlets and a leaf fallen on the ground.
REGIONAL REFEREES: Andhra Pradesh: Aasheesh Pittie; Goa: Heinz Lainer; Haryana: Harkirat S. Sangha; Karnataka: J.N. Prasad; Kerala: P.O. Nameer; Maharashtra: Nitin Jamdar; Punjab: H.S. Sangha; Rajasthan: H.S. Sangha; Tamil Nadu: V. Santharam.

CONTACT CALLS

"I think that the words and expressions used by Dr Kumar Ghorpadé in his Letters, *eg.*, "sunglasses covering your jaundiced eyes" (*Pitta* # 109-110) or "DNA freaks" (*Pitta* # 107), are most improper. He also criticizes the amateur birdwatcher *vis-à-vis* the professional ornithologist in condescending terms. Many professional ornithologists in the past and also the present acknowledge the role of the amateur in the study of birds, wildlife and environment. Let not vanity take over rational thinking and let each group acknowledge the role of the other. I think that Dr Ghorpadé is using *Pitta* as a forum for his personal feelings for people and their work. One can easily be constructively critical without being vitriolic. M. Krishnan, the noted wildlifer was often critical about various aspects of wildlife management and conservation but was never personal in his criticisms. In future the editors should insist that authors do not use such strong terms."
—Humayun Taher, Hyderabad.

"We have been hearing the Pied Crested Cuckoo's call regularly since the beginning of the month (April 2000). First my son said he had heard the call on 1st April. T. Vijayendra was here on April 2nd and we hear the call. At that time the sky was cloudy. There were 3-4 showers during these 20 days."[1]
—K. Suresh, Hyderabad.

THE *cachinnans*[2] CORNER

What happens when a duck flies upside-down?? They quack up!! [Birdchat]

"Birdwatching was once described as a 'mild paralysis of the central nervous system which can be cured by rising at dawn and sitting in a bog'." —Glanda Noramly (1996): Why would anyone want to watch birds? *Malayan Naturalist* 49(2). 34-36. [quoted by K.S. Gopi Sunder on bngbirds@egroup.com]

For Private Circulation Only

For information, write to: Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh, PO Box 45, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad 500034, India.
Editors: Aasheesh Pittie (3350683) & Siraj A Taher (6612608). **E-mail:** aasheesh@hd1.vsnl.net.in
Membership (Rs): Admission=20; Ordinary=100, Student=25 per annum; Life=1,000. *Outstation cheques not accepted.*
Editors' Note: We regret printing a map of India with wrong external boundaries on p. 2 in *Pitta* # 109-110. Dr Ghorpadé's column will resume from next month.

[1] Editors' Note: Surprisingly, this is the only report till now about the call of the Pied Crested Cuckoo! There are at least 2 resident cuckoo species that may be calling at this time and under the conditions described. The Common Hawk-Cuckoo and the Plaintive Cuckoo. Members should familiarize themselves with the call of all the three species to avoid confusion. The calls are very different from each other and diagnostic for identification.
[2] Editors' Note: *cachinnans* is Latin for "laughing" and is the specific name of a few birds.

Indexed 13/2/2001

7.8.20

PITTA

Bulletin of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh No 112: August 2000

PROGRAMME

FIELD CAMP: 13-15.viii.2000: Rollapadu Bustard Sanctuary, Kurnool District. Please see below (*Notes & News*) for details. In view of the Field Camp at Rollapadu, there will not be a regular 'monthly' field outing this month.
MEETING: 21-viii-2000, 6 p.m.: Talk by Dr Sivaramakrishna on "Tribal knowledge of bio-diversity in Andhra Pradesh" Vidyaranya High School, Opp., Secretariat, Saifabad, Hyderabad.

NOTES & NEWS

BSAP CAMP AT ROLLAPADU BUSTARD SANCTUARY

A camp for two batches is being arranged at Rollapadu Bustard Sanctuary (Kurnool District) from 13-15 and 20-22 August 2000. Each batch will consist of 25 participants whose name will be registered on a first-come-first-served basis. The last date for registration is 7th August 2000 for the first group. The groups will depart from Shanbhag Hotel, Panjagutta X Roads at 7am sharp on 13th / 20th morning and return to the same place by 8pm on 15th / 22nd. Registration charges are Rs650/- per person. Contact Aasheesh Pittie (3350683) / Siraj Taher (6612608) for bookings and details. Participants will carry out census of Great Indian Bustard, Blackbuck and Indian Wolf during their stay, besides general birding. Simple vegetarian food will be served. Dormitory-type accomodation is available. Personal equipment like binoculars, cameras, *etc*., will be owner's responsibility. Please bring plate, spoon, glass/cup, light sleeping bag, mosquito repellant, *etc*. Do not bring use-and-throw type plastic-ware.

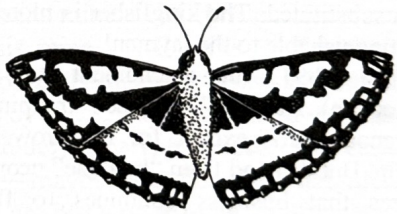
THE FIELD MUSE: Monsoon in Icrisat

Suhel Quader[1]

It is a perfect morning for a hunt. Dark, heavy clouds appear on the Western horizon and vanish in the East. A Redheaded Merlin flies low and fast, zigzagging over the waving grass. Its grey body is almost a blur as it heads straight towards a Streaked Fantail Warbler, displaying in a series of little roller-coaster ups and downs. Just under the crest of each ascent, the warbler makes a little "tlip" call. Now it sees the falcon, and dives desperately groundward. I hold my breath as it plummets and the falcon rockets towards it. A millisecond before disaster, the warbler reaches the safety of the thick grass. The predator dips briefly over the spot where its prey disappeared, and then carries on with its hunt, skimming the tips of the vegetation as it quarters the grassland looking for a meal.

Predation is not easy to observe in the wild. But on one occasion I watch a Blackwinged Kite detect something moving in the grass. It hovers over the spot, drops a little lower and hovers again. When it is about two metres over the grass it plunges, talons-first, wings in a deep 'V', and hits the ground with a thud. A few seconds later, it emerges with a large rodent in its claws. So large in fact, that the kite has difficulty taking off, and is dragged back to the ground a few metres away. But eventually it manages to become airborne, and flaps laboriously off to a nearby post to celebrate its success.

The monsoon is a magical time to be a part of nature's stage, each player—plant or animal—struggling with the grand themes of life and growth, reproduction and death. In July, the grass grows so rapidly one can almost hear cells dividing, shoots elongating, leaves unfurling. The calls of Peafowl and the howling of the wind, however, drown out this little daydream. A cloud of black-and-orange Joker[2] butterflies clusters around a flowering *Lantana* shrub, battling against the force of the wind. Occasionally my attention is diverted by a much larger Lime butterfly flitting through the mob, or by a Peacock Pansy opening and closing its wings while perched on a *Lantana* leaf. Red-and-black blister beetles chew doggedly away at yellow *Cassia auriculata* flowers. And little yellow parasitoid[3] wasps buzz energetically around, looking for suitable soft-bodied prey to sting, paralyze, and drag away to lay their eggs on.



One drizzling afternoon, a pack of six jackals emerges out of the soaking grass onto the relative dryness of a jeep track. Unaware of my presence, they start to groom themselves and one another. It seems to me that they allogroom[4] with great enthusiasm. One animal sits on its haunches while two others draw back their lips in a toothy grin and nibble at its throat and neck and ears, removing ticks from locations hard to reach without help. A fourth animal joins in, now grooming the sitting jackal, now grooming one of the two groomers. I watch for ten minutes before the pack slips into the grass again.

The physical force of the monsoon can have its dark side too. Blackthroated Weaverbirds suspend their nests from *Typha* reeds in ditches, and in one location I find a scattered colony with two complete nests (one with eggs, one with chicks), and many incomplete, "helmet"-shaped nests. A few days later there is a torrential downpour; 150mm of rain in a

[1] Suhel carries out his fieldwork on weaverbirds at the International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics, Patancheru, A.P.

[2] Joker *Byblia ilithya* (Drury). Illustration: Sachin Jaltare.

[3] parasitoids are insects whose larvae (immature stage) feed on living prey, eventually killing them.

[4] allogroom: the act of grooming another individual.

single day. This deluge flattens the reeds and washes away every nest. I do not see a blackthroated weaver for the next two days. But life is tenacious and there is still hope. As I write, the reeds are slowly growing back, and little flocks of blackthroats patrol the ditches. With time, and a little luck, the current nesting season will not be a complete disaster for them after all.

"More than a million birds are released each year in India by people who have deep religious beliefs or who simply want to show kindness. But these "humane" individuals do not realize that, far from helping the cause of wildlife, they are supporting a cruel and often deadly trade in birds.

"The practice of buying wild birds and then releasing them is long established in India. People of many religious faiths—Hindus Jain, Parsi, Sindhi, Muslim—release a number of birds on auspicious occasions, on feast days, or simply out of piety. For some individuals, such releases can be numbered in the hundreds.

"30-40% of all birds trapped for business in India are traded for the purpose of release. The rest are sold as pets or for the table. This is part of an international trade in which about 3.5 million wild birds are sold each year—though the number trapped is much higher, an estimated 14-20 million, since about three-quarters of them do not survive to reach the final buyer.

"A survey by TRAFFIC-India shows that birds for release range from the House Sparrow and Common Crow to globally endangered species such as the females of Finn's Baya and Green Munia. Generally these are individuals rendered non-commercial due to defects. This practice has increased the demand for species such as wagtails, kingfishers, bee-eaters and, hoopoes, which were otherwise not regularly trapped.

"In Lucknow and Hyderabad, both the Common and Jungle Crows are released on Thursdays and Fridays, a practice started by an old Nawab who sought divine blessings by tying ceremonial threads on the bird's legs.

"Similarly, the Indian Roller, or *Neelkanth*, is believed to be an incarnation of Lord Shiva. The demand for it is so high during Dushera festival that the Whitebreasted Kingfisher is often substituted. The kingfisher is more easily trapped and is indistinguishable to the layman!

"In 1991, an amendment to the Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 banned trapping and export of all indigenous birds except for the crow, which is classed as vermin. But demand from "humane" people for birds to release ensures that business continues to flourish for clans of professional bird trappers such as Baheliyas, Chirimars and Paydamis in the North, Mirshikaris, Sahnis, and Mundas in the East, Phasiya and Pardi in Peninsular India, Hakki pukki and Narikkova in South India and Garos in the North-East.

"The trade in birds for release has actually expanded the operation of the trappers. Many released species do not survive outside their habitats. Slatyheaded Parakeets or the Himalayan Greenfinch, caught in the Garwhal hills of the Himalayas, are unlikely to live if they are released on the Indian plains. Furthermore, mortality among freed birds is increased by the stress and injury they suffer at the hands of trappers and dealers.

"Birds caught by the latex method, in which a sticky substance is used, suffer damage to their flight feathers or from falling. Bird caught by a trained hawk (most commonly a shikra) more often than not have injuries that do not heal before they are sold.

"Insectivorous birds such as shrikes, hoopoes and bee-eaters are most vulnerable. The chances of dealers feeding them live insects are negligible, so they tend to starve for several hours, which further reduces their ability to survive. The trappers have no interest in the bird's survival beyond release, so they waste little attention on them during captivity.

"It is not only the desired species that suffers either. In June and July, the trapping season for the highly favoured granivorus munias, funnel nets are used to trap the birds at their roosts. But munias tends to nest in mixed roosts with insectivorous species such as Yellow-eyed Babblers, Ashy-wren Warblers and Reed warblers. Thus many of these are also caught and although they were traditionally released immediately, they are now kept until they can be sold. Large numbers die when they are eventually freed.

"Until the professional bird trapping communities, at the grassroots level, are rehabilitated into alternative job or greater enforcement of wildlife laws be brought about, the bird trade will continue. A customer may release birds valued Rs400 rupees a week, thus enabling a trapper earn Rs1600 a month on birds for release. It would be far better if this 'humane' person provide alternate employment to a trapper or donated that money to schemes for providing alternative employment for the people who now earn their living by trapping birds. That would earn divine blessings for the donor, the trapper—and the birds. [Abrar Ahmed, Sr. Programme Officer, TRAFFIC India. E-Mail : trfindia@del3.vsnl.net.in]

Calendar of Events

BNHS Programmes (Complete details from BNHS 022-2821811. Camps only for members of BNHS, nature-walks & talks open to all):

Annual Nature Camps for 2000-2001:

Wildlife study tour of Kenya 1 batch for 8 days, **viii-ix.2000**. Pachmarhi/Satpura National Park, M.P. **ix-x.2000**. Keoladeo & Ranthambhore National Parks, Rajasthan, **xi-xii.2000**. Andaman Islands **ii-iii.2001**. Corbett National Park **iv-v.2001**. Chopta (Garhwal, Himalaya), U.P. **viii-ix.2001**. Molem, Dandeli & Bhadra Wildlife Sanctuaries, Karnataka **xi-xii.2001**.

BNHS Bird Banding Training Programme for 2000-20001.

[There is likelihood of a camp at Sikkim in Oct-Nov 2000 and Kabar Tal in Jan-Feb 2001.]

5-14.ix.2000: New Delhi. **20-29.ix.2000:** Point Calimere, T.N. **28.x-6.xi.2000:** Point Calimere / Parambikulam. **25.xi-3.xii.2000:** Nashik, Maharashtra. **22-31.xii.2000:** Point Calimere / Pulicat, A.P. **20-29.i.2001:** Tirupati, A.P. / Kabartal, Bihar. **1-28.ii.2001:** Andaman & Nicobar Islands. **20-29.iii.2001:** Point Calimere.

6-11.viii.2000, Brazil: *Third International Symposium Workshop on Frugivores and Seed Dispersal*, Sao Pedro, Brazil. URL: www.unicamp.br/ib/f2000. E-mail: frug2000@unicamp.br.

23.ix.2000—1.x.2000, Nepal: *International Symposium on Galliformes*. Info., from Prof. A.H. Musavi, Secretary, W.P.A. India, 6 Kabeer Colony, Anoop Shahar Road, Aligarh 202002.

23-29.x.2000, Kandy, Sri Lanka: *PASOC 2000, Second Pan Asian Ornithological Congress*. Contact: PASSOC 2000 Secretariat, Field Ornithology Group of Sri Lanka, University of Colombo, Colombo 03, Sri Lanka. Tel: 94-075-342609. Fax: 94-075-337644. E-mail: fogsl@slt.lk.

25-28.ix.2001, Australia: *Australian Ornithological Conference*, hosted by Charles Sturt University in Bathurst, NSW. Website: http://clio.mit.csu.edu.au/aoc2001. For details contact Dr Andrew M. Fisher at afisher@csu.edu.au.

LETTER FROM AN INSECT-HUNTING ORNITHOLOGIST—36

"The destruction of natural habitats by man has been far more extensive and complete in India than perhaps anywhere else in the world. Of the various factors by which this has been brought about, deforestation must be considered as the most important. The forest has been systematically reduced and eradicated nearly over the whole of India (see Chapter VI). The disappearance of the forest has so completely altered the entire ecosystem that the conditions are suboptimal for the greatest majority of species. The other factors, which we have enumerated above, greatly accelerated the effects of destruction of forests.

"The process of extermination of species became biogeographically significant about two hundred years ago in India. Since India became independent in 1947, partly the haste to break away from centuries-old taboos, restrictions and religious traditions that had most effectively insured the sanctity of flora and fauna, and partly the disastrous policy of civil disobedience preached by politicians during the independence struggle have widely encouraged a wholesome contempt for game laws and nature sanctuaries and government control regulations have only served to create a most flourishing illegal market in various animal and forest products. India has thus effectively destroyed in twenty years of freedom what Nature had endowed her as a result of millions of years of organic evolution. Even the relatively sheltered forms that are not directly influenced by human activities have been involved in these chain processes.

"That formerly more humid conditions especially humid tropical forests flourished over most of the Southern Block than now is evident from the fact that nearly 70% of the mammals now found in semi-arid areas of the Eastern Ghats are ecologically semi-humid elements. The only recognizable pockets of survival of the conditions that prevailed in former times, are met with in the high mountains of the Southern Block and to some extent in the wooded parts of the Chota-Nagpur Plateau. Everywhere else a combination of natural and human factors has completely altered the original ecology of the Peninsula...

"The ecological pockets introduce an important factor in biogeographical evolution, viz. isolation. The isolation is partly purely geographical, due to physical barriers like the Garo-Rajmahal Hills Gap, the gaps in the socalled Eastern Ghats, the Palghat Gap, etc. It is to a much greater extent the result of destruction of habitats due to deforestation and human settlements...Interpretation of the present-day climatic and vegetational peculiarities of the Peninsula, without reference to the historical background, results in creating a number of biogeographical anomalies...

"...Biogeographically India may largely be described, therefore, as a land of vanishing relicts. In combination with the geological maturity, the senile topography, faunal stability and the relative evolutionary stagnation that marks the Peninsula, the effects of the present-day conditions tend greatly to accelerate and intensify these processes."

[M. S. Mani, 1974, "Limiting Factors", pp. 154-158, *In*: Ecology and Biogeography in India]

Decay...**ecosystem decay**—that is what is going on all over our only planet and what David Quammen had highlighted in his important book, "*The Song of the Dodo*" about which I wrote in my last month's Letter. This is exactly what was mentioned by Prof. M.S. Mani, in Chapter V of his edited book cited above, that alludes to Quammen's "dark new idea...forcing itself on the world", a full two decades and two years earlier (see p.154). He wrote that "destruction of given habitats triggered off **chain-effects** [emphasis mine—K.G.] in other ecosystems, so that the effects of human interference...lopping of forest for firewood, over-grazing, rapid urbanization, recent industrialization and consequent industrial pollution of waters, railroad constructions, *etc*...in one area gradually diffused to far off parts of the country, not directly involved and gave rise to **unsuspected remote effects**" [emphasis mine—K.G.]. Mani also stated that there was "abundant evidence of the indirect effects of **chain-reaction** [emphasis mine—K.G.] due to disturbances in ecosystem elsewhere," and that only some "inaccessible and least hospitable areas of the Himalaya, Assam and the extreme south of the Western Ghats have thus largely escaped direct destruction of habitats by man". He even vented the plain truth that "introduction and extensive cultivation of plantation crops like coffee, tea, rubber, eucalyptus, cacao and cashewnut have taken a heavy toll of even the relict forests of hills like the Nilgiri". Coffee—maybe, but the others definitely! The misty cloud-bound plateau of the Nilgiri Hills and the once densely clothed slopes are but a poor remnant of what the first European explorers must have experienced in those times.

In the second paragraph of the quotation above, there is a premise that it is only after we attained our independence that most of our nation's biodiversity wealth created by evolution, and not 'owned' by us, was destroyed. I am in almost total agreement with this scholarly and well-grounded, historically savvy view. The current environmentalist 'grapevine' about who was responsible for the loss of our plant life and its animal inhabitants puts the blame squarely on our colonial rulers for the past 1,000 years or so, as well as on the erstwhile rulers of the 600+ princely states that the present India was built from. Some recent writers have torched the Moghul, British and Princely India rulers of our historical land. The data they present is presumptive and unsubstantiated with facts. I believe that it is we, the huge 'free India' populace, who have totally destroyed our country of its biological treasures and are still doing it with gay abandon. In 45 years of my hunting in the wilderness (with gun, binoculars or insect net) here, I have seen more than 70% of what I knew existed gone. M. Krishnan, my first real 'guru', wrote that if we free Indians cannot exist using 90% of our nation's biological wealth and territory there must be something gravely wrong with us. It is with a sigh of relief that I realize he is no more alive to see what his countrymen and countrywomen (the firewood collectors and also the cosmetic and fashion crazy consumers) have done to his land of birth. Unless we do something quickly and forcibly together to save this 'god-given' resource that still exists precariously, not abounds, there will be nothing native in this land but only Australian *Eucalyptus*, *Acacia* and other exotic trees, American cockroaches and European rats here, all of them alien to this sub-continent!

The growth of human population in less developed, mainly tropical countries, combined with the highly consumerist (of energy and man-made products) urban lifestyle of developed, mostly temperate ones (now being blindly 'aped' by

developing countries), is sounding the death-knell of many other forms of life. The abundantly visible ecosystem decay, the chain effect and remote effects have already set in an irreversible chain-reaction that looks ominous to me, but seems hardly existant, or threatening, to many others.

Is there a way out? Can the human mutate and evolve into a creature that quickly re-learns to live with Nature, his only God in real survival terms? Perhaps, but not unless he transforms himself and herself from a "frog in the well" to an "eagle in the sky" viewing the earth as never seen by human eyes (or the mind) before and learns to cooperate and work towards a sustainable population (not 'development', or anything else, which is not as important as this) that respects the balance and laws of Nature and the carrying capacity of ecosystems, whether natural and relatively undisturbed (rural) or artificial and grossly modified (urban and industrial).

We must not just crave after conservation of the Tiger here, or the Golden Toad in Costa Rica, or the Numbat in southwestern Australia, or even the Kagu bird in New Caledonia. It is time we all got together, listened to the biological scientists "who have been murmuring about the phenomenon of unraveling ecosystems" (Quammen, 1996) and put to work a realistic plan with the aid of an educated, trained and empowered Task Force to restore this green earth of ours. This, for our own survival and also a carefully regulated 'entertainment', even if the mass of humanity is ignorant of other living beings on whom we depend on for our survival, whether we know this or not.

In the entire 100 pages of the ICBP (International Council for Bird Preservation, Cambridge, U.K.) "work" (p. iv) titled Putting biodiversity on the map: priority areas for global conservation (1992) I was pained not to read anything specifically about protection of any single threatened or ecologically 'keystone' plant species, or an example of any plant community or forest ecosystem which is critical for the continued survival of restricted or endemic bird (or other animal) species. Where are the field botanists today? Why is no one clamouring for saving ominously or visibly threatened plant species?

Unless we make eco-restoration our singular goal immediately and assume a social task force aggressiveness to protect the still undisturbed ecosystems, and scientifically (mainly botanically) restore the disturbed ones, whether in our own backyard or city block/park, or chemically polluted and native-tree-bare farms/plantations, or even disturbed and degraded jungles and waterbodies, just howling and baying for the tiger, or the Narbada river, or ill-treated domestic animals is not going to help save this magnificently handsome beast or his adopted home (and those of other animals and plants) here in our sub-continent.

Earlier this year, on invitation to give lectures in Field Entomology to teachers in a Refresher Course in Ecology and Environmental Sciences at Pondicherry University, I had the opportunity of accompanying these teachers to Auroville, nearby. We were taken around this wonderfully restored and re-vegetated area and told about eco-restoration and local biodiversity use, by foreigners who mainly operate this Central Government-backed Trust. We were shown colour slides of the 'before and after' of this once devastated area, now swaying and flowering with much plant life actually seeded and rooted by these dedicated and determined alien eco-restorers, in teamwork with local natives who had to be educated and trained by them to help. Visibly flourishing cashew plantations have come up around Auroville, but the "spray or suffer" publicity of pesticide companies is a new threat to the ecology of this masterpiece eco-restoration model and needs public action. Cashew (*Anacardium occidentale*) is of the Mango family, the Anacardiaceae, and is an exotic, introduced to India by foreign colonialists. It flowers abundantly for many months and has relatively few insect 'pests', not being indigenous. Many native pollinating, or just flower-visiting, insects use its inflorescences and fruit-set depends on insect pollination to an extent. Cashew planters should be educated and then convinced not to overdo insectide spraying but adopt an IPM (Integrated Pest Management) strategy to get good yields, as is practiced elsewhere in the country successfully. However, the cashew in flower is sustenance to a wide variety of insects (harmless to man's interest, many beneficial to him) which, in turn, most certainly use other flora growing nearby for feeding and/or breeding. Abundance of insect life means a plethora of insectivorous birds (and other animals) and this could be the initiation of a welcome opposite kind of "chain-reaction", to what Mani and Quammen warned us about, which is now resulting in scientific murmer about a 'dark new idea of ecosystem decay'.

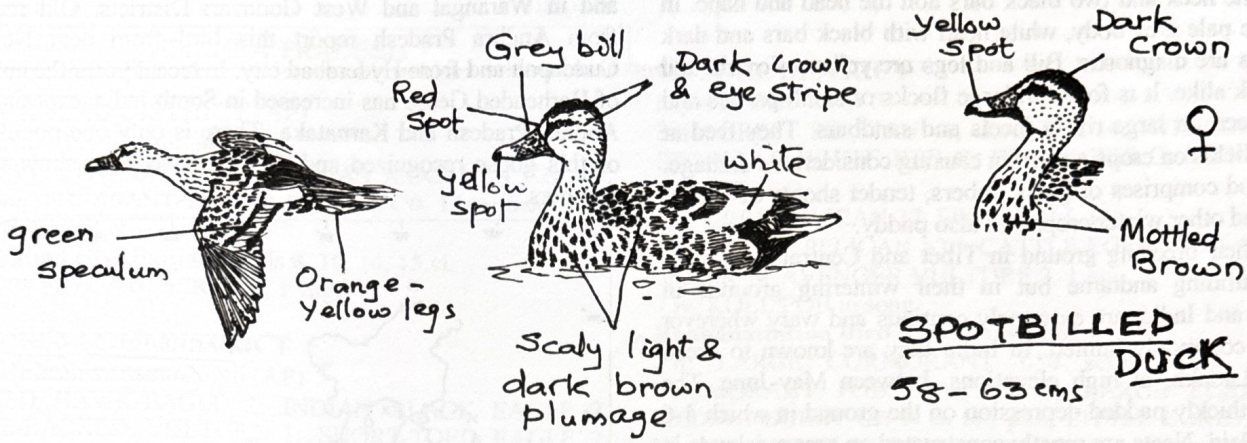
If a lushly wooded Auroville is possible in 2 to 3 decades of human effort, do you not see the potential elsewhere? At least one large-eyed Layard's Flycatcher (*Muscicapa muttui* Layard), with distinct dark malar stripes carefully mentioned by Grimmett and the Inskipps (1998: 634, pl. 100), I actually thought did. Unlike its habit of sortying after insect food from low perches, this individual was catching them from branchlets at least 15 feet up in the shady Auroville Nursery, on 29th March, half past noon. The bird was saying to me "I like this place, most definitely", so why don't we start creating more of these 'Aurovilles', from desolate and waste areas, also for our own survival, happiness and enjoyment?

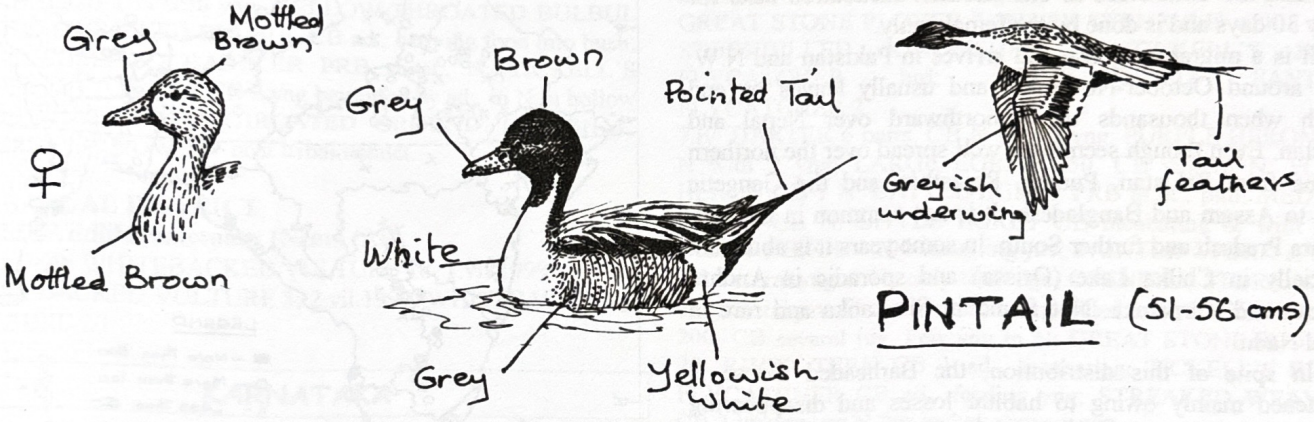
[**Errata:** Letter 35—*Pitta* # 109-110, Page 3, Line 22 from top of quotation, should read "diclassé", not "diclassi". **Corrigenda:** Page 2, the Map was reproduced from the original paper of D.L. Pearson & F. Cassola, 1992, *Conservation Biology*, 6: 385, but the political boundaries depicted therein are erroneous, please note.]

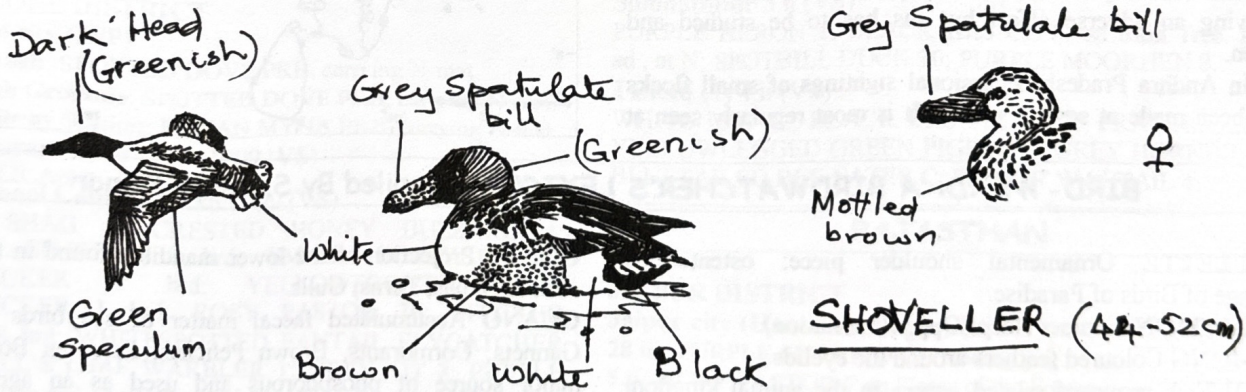
—Dr Kumar Ghorpadé, 1861 Bethel Street, Bangalore 560 043, India & <varanus.kg@mailcity.com>

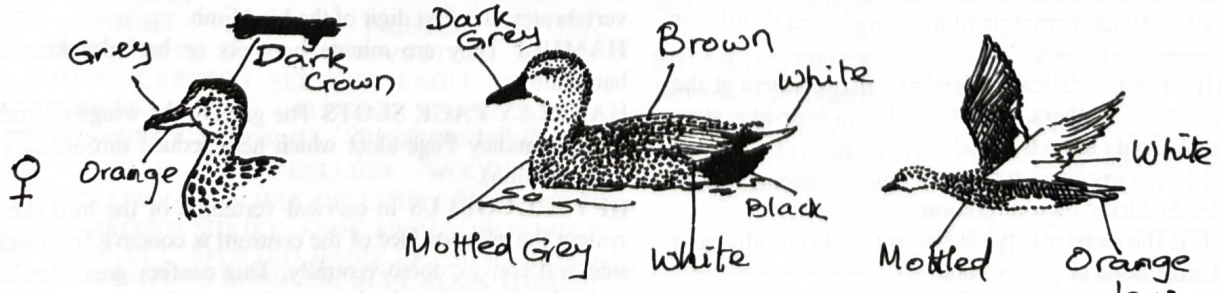
FIELD CRAFT *By* Siraj Taher & Sachin Jaltare

GEESE & DUCKS (Family: Anatidae): This is a very diverse and large group of waterbirds of varying sizes and colours, having flat beaks, webbed feet and short tails. These birds are mostly seen in large flocks or small parties. The regularity of their appearance between October and March every year throughout India on all types of inland water-bodies is a spectacular example of bird migration. Most species coming to A.P. are migratory, barring four.









SPOTLIGHT: Barheaded Goose *Anser indicus* By Siraj A. Taher

This column focuses on birds that are in the Red Data Book of BirdLife International as threatened / highly threatened species. Readers are requested to send information about these birds to the Society.

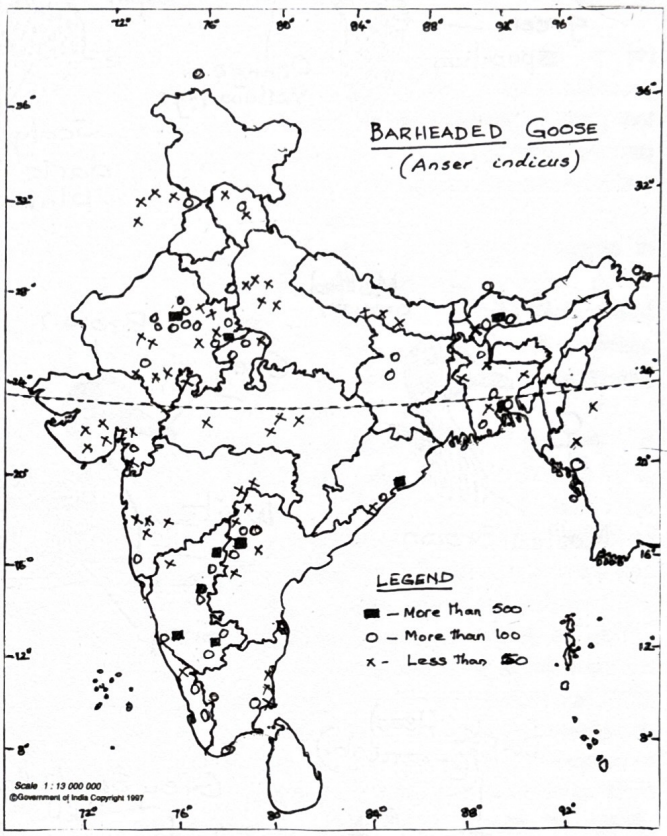
A pale grey and white goose. The head and throat are white and the neck is brown. There is a white stripe on each side of the neck and two black bars aon the head and nape. In flight the pale grey body, white head with black bars and dark wing tips are diagnostic. Bill and legs are yellow. Female and male look alike. It is found in large flocks or small parties and mostly seen on large rivers jheels and sandbars. They feed at night in fields on crops and grain causing considerable damage. Their food comprises of grass, tubers, tender shoots of wheat, pulses and other winter crops and also paddy.

In their breeding ground in Tibet and Central Asia, they seem confiding andtame but in their wintering grounds in Pakistan and India, are extremely cautious and wary wherever they are commonly hunted. In India they are known to breed only in Ladakh, at high elevations, between May-June. The nest is a thickly padded depression on the ground in which 4-6 eggs are laid. Nests are mostly constructed on grassy islands in lakes and are built close to one another. Incubation lasts for nearly 30 days and is done by the female only.

It is a migratory goose and arrives in Pakistan and N.W. India around October-November and usually leaves by end March when thousands travel northward over Nepal and Pakistan. Even though seemingly well spread over the northern regions from Pakistan, Punjab, Rajasthan and the Gangetic Plain to Assam and Bangladesh, it is not common in Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh and further South. In some years it is abundant especially in Chilka Lake (Orissa) and sporadic in Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka. Not found in Sri Lanka and rare in Tamil Nadu.

In spite of this distribution, the Barheaded Goose is threatened mainly owing to habitat losses and disappearing wetlands. Probably extensive use of pesticides and insecticides is having an adverse affect but ths has to be studied and proven.

In Andhra Pradesh occassional sightings of small flocks have been made at several places. It is most regularly seen at the large waterbodies like Manjira Bird Sanctuary and the Singur Dam area. Small parties have been seen at Pocharam and in Warangal and West Godavari Districts. Old records from Andhra Pradesh report this bird from near Nellore, Cuddapah and from Hyderabad city. In recent years the number of Barheaded Geese has increased in South India, especially in Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka. There is only one population of this goose recognized and the trends seem to show stable numbers.



BIRD-*WORD*: A BIRDWATCHER'S LEXICON Compiled By S. Ashok Kumar

EPAULETTE Ornamental shoulder piece; ostentatious plumage of Birds of Paradise.

ESTIVATION Summer sleep (Opp: Hibernation).

EYE-RING Coloured feathers around the eyelids.

FAMILY A group of related genera in the animal kingdom having certain common characters is classified as family by taxonomist and the family names end with 'idea'.

FEATHER PULP The dermal papilla having blood capillaries nerves and connective tissues.

FILOPLUME It is the delicate, filament - like feathers at the base of the contour feathers. Filoplume has a hair-like stem with a tuft of filaments at its free end.

FLYWAY Flyway is the traditional and seasonal route followed by birds during their migration .

FURCULA It is the slender clavicle bones fused ventrally, and is also called wish bone or pulley bone.

GAMOSEMATIC DISPLAY Display which assists the female bird in selecting a mate for pair formation.

GIZZARD It is the second part of stomach which has heavy muscular walls.

GONYS Projection of the lower mandible found in the birds such as Skuas, Terns, Gulls.

GUANO Accumulated faecal matter of sea birds such as Gannets, Cormorants, Brown Pelicans, Peruvian Boobies, a major source of phosphorous and used as an agricultural fertiliser.

HALLUS Hind toe or first toe of a bird and in land vertebrates, the first digit of the hind limb.

HAMULI They are minute hooklets or barbules known as barbicels.

HANDLEY PAGE SLOTS The gaps in the wings of birds is called Handley Page slots which help reduce turbulence (See emargination).

HETEROCOELUS In cervical vertebrae of the bird skeletal system the anterior face of the centrum is concave from side to side and convex dorso-ventrally. This confers great flexibility and helps in pruning feathers in all parts of the body. All birds move their necks through 180° and the Wryneck (*Jynx*) 360°.

HUMERALS Humerals are the Feathers supported by humerus bone.

BIRDING NOTES Compiled by Aasheesh Pittie

This column publishes birding notes in brief telegraphic form, from **Andhra Pradesh, Goa, Haryana, Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra, Punjab, Rajasthan & Tamil Nadu** on interesting and significant sightings and behaviour like breeding, feeding, migration, nesting, *etc*. Notes on flowering and fruiting trees and their relationship with birds are also welcome. English names and classification follow, S.D. Ripley's *A Synopsis of the Birds of India and Pakistan* (1982, 2nd ed.) and scientific nomenclature, T. Inskipp, N. Lindsey & W. Duckworth's *An Annotated Checklist of the Birds of the Oriental Region* (1996). Unless specified, all observations are for 2000. Abbreviations, Contributors, Notes, Regional Referees, *etc*., are at the end. For selection of breeding criteria 'Probable, Possible, Confirmed', see *Pitta* # 82, February 1998, p. 4.

ANDHRA PRADESH

HYDERABAD DISTRICT (AP)

Hyderabad city, Jubilee Hills

27.vi: YELLOW BITTERN 1; INDIAN MOORHEN CB, ad., with yng; PHEASANT-TAILED JACANA CB, 1 bird incubating eggs on floating N.

Hyderabad city, Banjara Hills 8, 10, 14, 15.vi.

BROWN FLYCATCHER PRB, 1 yng.[1]

MAHBUBNAGAR DISTRICT

Uma Maheshwaram[2] 23.vii (AP)

BOOTED HAWK-EAGLE 2; INDIAN BLACK EAGLE 2; WHITE-BACKED VULTURE 1; SHORT-TOED EAGLE 2; GREY JUNGLEFOWL hrd; PEAFOWL hrd; LARGE GREEN BARBET CB 1 N with yng; YELLOW-THROATED BULBUL 1; WHITE-BROWED BULBUL CB ad., carrying food into bush; RUFOUSBELLIED BABBLER PRB const., N; TICKELL'S BLUE FLYCATCHER CB 2 yng being fed by ad., in N in hollow of tree trunk; WHITE-THROATED GROUND THRUSH 1; HOUSE SPARROW 20+ near tribal hamlet.

WARANGAL DISTRICT

Pakhal Wildlife Sanctuary (Near) (AE)

30.vi.1999: WHITEBACKED VULTURE 18. 1.vii.1999: WHITEBACKED VULTURE 3; 2.vii.1999: WHITEBACKED VULTURE 20

KARNATAKA

BANGALORE DISTRICT

Bangalore city (JNP)

9.vii: **Lalbagh**: SPOTTED DOVE PRB, carrying N-mat.

22.vii: **High Grounds**: SPOTTED DOVE PRB, carrying N-mat.

26.vii: **Railway Station**: INDIAN MYNA PRB, carrying N-mat.

Krishnapuram Lake 18.xii.1999 (VS)

GREY PELICAN 9.

Valley School Campus 19.xii.1999 (VS)

INDIAN SHAG 1; CRESTED HONEY BUZZARD 1; PAINTED SPURFOWL? hrd; SMALL SCALYBELLIED WOODPECKER 1 hrd; YELLOWFRONTED PIED WOODPECKER 1 hrd; ROSY PASTOR 30; SPOTTED BABBLER hrd; WHITESPOTTED FANTAIL FLYCATCHER 2; TICKELL'S LEAF WARBLER 1; GREY TIT 3; PURPLE SUNBIRD several M in eclipse plm.

KODAGU DISTRICT

DARTER; NIGHT HERON; PAINTED STORK; BLACKWINGED KITE; SCAVENGER VULTURE; SHORT-TOED EAGLE; CRESTED SERPENT EAGLE; OSPREY; COOT; GREAT STONE PLOVER; STORKBILLED KINGFISHER; GREY HORNBILL; CRIMSON-THROATED BARBET; LITTLE SCALYBELLIED WOODPECKER; SMALL YELLOWNAPED WOODPECKER; REDRUMPED SWALLOW; BROWN SHRIKE; ASHY SWALLOW-SHRIKE; SCARLET MINIVET; SPOTTED BABBLER; BLACKHEADED BABBLER; RUFOUS BABBLER; BLUE ROCK THRUSH; BLACKBIRD; GREY TIT; YELLOWCHEEKED TIT. LOTEN'S SUNBIRD.

MYSORE DISTRICT

Mysore District (VS)

3.ii: GREY PELICAN 4; DARTER 4; WHITENECKED STORK 12; WHITE IBIS C; BLACK IBIS C; SHOVELLER 300; COOT C.

4.ii: GREY PELICAN 27; SPOONBILL 1.

31.iii: GREY PELICAN >30; CATTLE EGRET POB several in br., plm; SCAVENGER VULTURE 2, 1 juv.

7.iv: KOEL POB in song.

Ranganathittoo Bird Sanctuary (VS)

2.ii: LARGE CORMORANT <50 several juv.; LITTLE CORMORANT POB; DARTER 6; LARGE EGRET few; MEDIAN EGRET CB N in br., plm; LITTLE EGRET POB in br., plm; NIGHT HERON >200, CB, juv., seen; OPENBILL STORK CB N, <100, 2-3 juv.; SPOONBILL <50, CB N; GREAT STONE PLOVER 2; RIVER TERN CB N with 3 eggs; STORKBILLED KINGFISHER 1; TICKELL'S BLUE FLYCATCHER hrd; WHITESPOTTED FANTAIL FLYCATCHER 2.

7.iv: DARTER 6 pairs, CB N with 2 yng; PURPLE HERON CB N with 2 yng; LARGE EGRET <50, CB yng in N; POND HERON CB 1 N; CATTLE EGRET PRB in br., plm; MEDIAN EGRET CB N; LITTLE EGRET CB incubating & with yng; NIGHT HERON >100 including juv; PAINTED STORK *c*. 300, CB several yng at N ready to fledge; OPENBILL STORK >300, CB several juv. Green N-mat., being added to N; SPOONBILL *c*. 200. CB several juv. Few yng in N; GREAT STONE PLOVER 20; RIVER TERN CB 1 ad., incubating; TICKELL'S BLUE FLYCATCHER CB ad., feeding yng; STREAKED WEAVER CB 3 incomplete N few inches above water.

Somnathpur 5.ii (VS)

PURPLE HERON 1; BLACK IBIS CB N on Rain Tree. Both ad., at N; SPOTBILL DUCK 30; PURPLE MOORHEN 8.

Talkad (?) 4.ii (VS)

WHITE IBIS 12; BLACK IBIS 3; LARGE PRATINCOLE 1; YELLOWLEGGED GREEN PIGEON 2; GREY HORNBILL 6; BLUETAILED BEE-EATER C; FOREST WAGTAIL 4.

RAJASTHAN

JAIPUR DISTRICT

Jaipur city (Hanuman Nagar) HSS

28.iii: PURPLE SUNBIRD CB feeding yng.

5.iv: ROSY PASTOR 7 on Flame of the Forest.

16.iv: REDWATTLED LAPWING PRB mating.

15.v: REDWINGED BUSHLARK CB feeding yng.

22.v: BAYA PRB const., N.

SIKAR DISTRICT

Revasa Salt Lake HSS 29.v

GREATER FLAMINGO 125+; REDWATTLED LAPWING 150+; REDSHANK 8; BLACKWINGED STILT CB 200 pairs incubating; AVOCET 30; GREAT STONE PLOVER 6.

TAMIL NADU

CHENNAI DISTRICT

Chennai city, Santhome (VS)

17.iv: WHITEBREASTED KINGFISHER PRB, seen mating.

COIMBATORE DISTRICT

Indira Gandhi Wildlife Sanctuary 11-12.iii (SP)

GREYHEADED FISH EAGLE; CRESTED SERPENT EAGLE; KESTREL; MAROONBACKED IMPERIAL PIGEON; HILL MYNA; WHITEBELLIED TREEPIE; BLUECHAT; MALBAR WHISTLING THRUSH; FOREST WAGTAIL; LOTEN'S SUNBIRD; COMMON ROSEFINCH.

NILGIRIS DISTRICT

Madhuvana Estate, Gudalur 1-6.iv (VS)

CRESTED GOSHAWK PRB 2 pairs, disp[3]; RUFOUSBELLIED HAWK-EAGLE pair; BLACK EAGLE; SHAHEEN FALCON 2; GREYFRONTED GREEN PIGEON C; BLUEWINGED PARAKEET C; BANDED BAY CUCKOO hrd; WHITE-RUMPED SPINETAIL SWIFT 20; MALABAR GREY HORNBILL hrd; LARGE GOLDENBACKED WOODPECKER drumming; HEARTSPOTTED WOODPECKER 2 pairs; WHITEBELLIED TREEPIE 3; PIED FLYCATCHER-SHRIKE in pairs; SCARLET MINIVET C; FAIRY BLUEBIRD C; GREYHEADED BULBUL 4; BLACK BULBUL 2; SLATY-HEADED SCIMITAR BABBLER hrd; WYNAAD LAUGHING THRUSH; THICKBILLED WARBLER 2; LARGE-CROWNED LEAF WARBLER hrd; BLUEHEADED ROCK THRUSH 4; MALABAR WHISTLING THRUSH hrd; YELLOW-CHEEKED TIT CB 3 pairs, ad., with juv; FOREST WAGTAIL 2; THICKBILLED FLOWERPECKER 1; RUFOUSBELLIED MUNIA 6.

Mudumalai Wildlife Sanctuary (VS)

3-4.ii: CRESTED HONEY BUZZARD 1; WHITEBACKED VULTURE 2; RED SPURFOWL 2; PEAFOWL C; EDIBLE NEST SWIFTLET several; CRESTED TREE SWIFT hrd; LITTLE SCALYBELLIED WOODPECKER 1; BROWN-CAPPED PYGMY WOODPECKER 1; YELLOWCHEEKED TIT 4; SMALL SUNBIRD hrd.

3.iii—1.iv: BANDED BAY CUCKOO hrd; COMMON HAWK-CUCKOO hrd; STORKBILLED KINGFISHER hrd.

ABBREVIATIONS: Ab-abundant; ad-adult/s; br-breeding; C-common/ly; CB-confirmed breeding; const-construction/ing; *c.*-approxim-ately; disp-display/ing; F-female; flt-flight; fly-family; freq-frequent/ly; hrd-heard; id-identify/ied; imm-immature; inc-include/ing; Is-Island; juv-juvenile; LM-local migrant; M-male; mat-material; N-nest/ing/s; POB-possible breeding; PRB-probable breeding; plm-plumage; RF-Reserve Forest; Resp-respectively; Tlk-Taluk; vil-village; WL-wildlife; yng-young.

CONTRIBUTORS: Aasheesh Pittie (AP); Amitabh Epur (AE); Harkirat Singh Sangha (HSS); JN Prasad (JNP); Shiva Prasad (SP).

REGIONAL REFEREES: Andhra Pradesh: Aasheesh Pittie; Goa: Heinz Lainer; Haryana: Harkirat S. Sangha; Karnataka: J.N. Prasad; Kerala: P.O. Nameer; Maharashtra: Nitin Jamdar; Punjab: H.S. Sangha; Rajasthan: H.S. Sangha; Tamil Nadu: V. Santharam.

CONTACT CALLS

"We have received the following two books which are considered classics on Indian Birds.

1. A Field Guide to the Birds of India, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh and Maldives. By Krys Kazmierczak & Ber van Perlo. Price Rs. 795/-.
2. Birds of Nepal. By Robert L. Fleming Sr., Robert L. Fleming Jr. & Lain Singh Bangdel. 4th Impression. Price Rs. 795/-

Members of your society are welcome to place orders for the above books. They will get 10% discount & free postage by VPP."

—**Upendra Arora**, Natraj Publishers, 17 Rajpur Road, Dehra Dun 248001.

LITERARY WRENDITIONS

"All through the evenings and nights we spent there we could hear the loons calling to one another across the dark lake: wild, wondrous canticles plucked from the lake's bottom on their long, deep dives, balanced a moment in their throats, then flung up toward the stars, the moon-edged clouds, and the dark, brooding shapes of the mountains sliding away, one behind the other, into the steep night. What a noise there must have been when owls sang in the tall virgin pines, when lynx screeched out their passion, and wolves added their howls to the loons' weird wailings!"

—**Robert Finch** *in* Common Ground. A Naturalist's Cape Cod. W.W. Norton & Co. New York.

"If men had wings and bore black feathers, few of them would be clever enough to be crows."

—**Rev. Henry Ward Beecher**, mid 1800s

For Private Circulation Only

For information, write to: Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh, PO Box 45, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad 500034, India.

Editors: Aasheesh Pittie (3350683) & Siraj A Taher (6612608). **E-mail**: aasheesh@hd1.vsnl.net.in

Membership (Rs): Admission=20; Ordinary=100, Student=25 per annum; Life=1,000. *Outstation cheques not accepted.*

[1] Brown Flycatcher, *Muscicapa latirostris* Raffles, is supposedly a winter migrant in our area. Two records of birds during June-July from the Eastern Ghats complex are the only occurrences outside the winter (migratory) season. In light of this, the present record is of special interest.

[2] BSAP field trip. One Tree Shrew, *Anathana ellioti* (Waterhouse), was sighted on the *ghat* road up the hill.

[3] "Displaying white outer tail-coverts in flight."

IP TTA

Bulletin of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh No 113: September 2000

PROGRAMME

FIELD OUTING: 24.ix.2000: Shamirpet Lake: Members are requested to assemble in Shamirpet tourist complex lounge, by 7.30am. This will be a half-day trip. Carry water and refreshments.

8.x.2000: Narsapur Reserved Forest, Medak District: Members are requested to reach the destination by 7am. Vehicles will start from Shanbhag Hotel, Panjagutta at 6am. This will be a full day trip and members should carry lunch and water. Hourly buses, starting at 5.30am to Medak *via* Narsapur, leave Imliban Bus Stand and Jubilee Bus Stand, Secunderabad. Narsapur R.F. is the closest patch of forest to Hyderabad and harbors many species that are not found within the city. These include Gold-fronted Chloropsis, White-throated Ground Thrush, Grey Tit and a fascinating variety of small passerines and butterflies.

MEETING: 18-ix-2000, 6 p.m.: "Rollapadu experience". Talk and slide-show by participants of the Society's Field Camp at Rollapadu. Vidyaranya High School, Opp., Secretariat, Saifabad, Hyderabad.

NOTES & NEWS

ROLLAPADU RAMBLINGS

J.V.D. Moorty

A 6.30 a.m. departure was delayed by about 45 minutes, but the clear road, lovely weather and the expectations of the trip helped us reach Rollapadu by 2 p.m. There was a brief shopping stop at Kurnool, and another at Nandikotkoor for lunch. Just before we reached the forest rest house, we stopped to admire some blackbuck feeding in the fields.

The forest Department knew about our visit and we settled to unpacking and getting things organised, the first thing, of course being a cup of tea for everybody. This is where all the discussions bore fruit and tea was rustled up in double quick time for everyone, because soon after that we were heading into the field.

4 p.m. and we were off into the field, and very soon I found myself with Tom, Sachin, Samson and Pramodh. Aasheesh who was with us was led away by one of the forest watchers. There were larks galore, and pipits as well; Rain Quail were calling all around us and eventually after a couple of tries Tom flushed a couple so that we had good look at them in flight; Blackbuck grazing in the distance, and we thought we saw a Great Indian Bustard in the far distance. Even the scope didn't help! That's when Sam, whom Sachin promptly christened as Sam Courser, came into his own by spotting a pair of Indian Coursers. We stalked them and had a marvelous view. Sachin even managed to sketch them. Then, Tom who was scanning the area behind us announced: "Florican!" There it was. A male. Just the way it should look. We watched it for well over 20 minutes. But the bird wouldn't let us approach closer. As it was getting late, we got back to the rest house. We tried to be very casual about our sightings and were rewarded with the expressions of the other members at our results. The 'cooks' among us got down to preparing dinner. Vinay got down to his barbecue, having made preparations for this soon after our arrival. The Kurnool stop was now clear. Sachin and I got the gas going for some curry and rice. It was a very hungry and tired lot who polished off dinner in no time. Then it was bedtime for an early start the next morning.

Day 2 was hectic. We were out in the field for a census of the blackbuck, which was the main purpose of the camp. Sachin, Samson, Vinay and I formed a group and we had the south-eastern quarter as our area for survey. We decided to split the work amongst us, with Vinay and Samson doing the census; Sachin and I doing general birding. We decided to work our way inwards from the east as that we would have the sun behind us in the morning. Birding was "normal" for this time of the year. We found the skull and a few ribs of what must have been a handsome buck, a victim, in all probability, of wolves. We worked our way towards the western periphery to a small pool of water and had a Green Sandpiper keep us engrossed for a while. Sachin also saw a Painted Snipe, but then he wasn't too sure as the bird just refused to come out from its refuge in the tallish undergrowth.

The Sandpiper delayed a simple lunch of rice and dal. An hour's rest and we were off for the evening session. Sachin and I spotted a White-necked Stork; after deliberating about it and looking up the books we were sure we had the ID right!

This time we started from the western boundary, because we had the sun behind us and, we were sure that the Florican would cover the same ground as it did the previous day. 'Sam Courser' was at it again, spotting a fox, slyly watching us from behind a small bush. Then Vinay spotted the Florican and the four of us had good views of it. We managed to stalk it successfully to within 20 metres before it flew off, giving us a glorious view of its plumage and flight feathers. We then saw a Wolf in the distance attempting to stalk a herd of blackbuck. It was interesting to note how the females herded the young to the safety of open land away from the bush-ringed periphery while the males kept watch, eventually moving away. The wolf then reappeared, with the hind leg of a blackbuck in its mouth—from an earlier kill. To crown the evening we had a great view of a pair of Bonelli's Eagles, but not better than Aasheesh and Shafaatsaab who had managed to drive up very close to the birds perched atop a post.

The forest staff cooked dinner in the evening; the 'chefs' among us breathed huge sighs of relief.

Day 3. We drove into the surrounding fields and after a frustrating hour were rewarded with the sighting of two female Great Indian Bustards. Our return to the rest house had us scurrying towards Aasheesh, who had opted to stay back with Sachin, to see the Florican he so desperately wanted to see! He did! So did we. Sachin, Samson and I had the delight and satisfaction of having seen the only Florican in the sanctuary at that time on all the three days of our stay there!

As planned, we left for Hyderabad at noon. A sincere word of thanks, to the Forest Department for the arrangements and their watchers, who accompanied us on our walkabouts. Their knowledge of birds and the life in the sanctuary is truly amazing. It was a pleasure having them with us. If only all of them had the same amount of enthusiasm!

THE FIELD MUSE: Of blisters and heronries

Suhel Quader[1]

August, and every living thing seems to be operating in high gear. Icrisat teems with grasshoppers; hundreds of them skip smartly out of the way as I wade through the vegetation. Little bands of Cattle Egrets scour patches of grass, using each other as beaters in their morning *shikar*. A pair of male Jungle Wren Warblers gets into a deafening slanging match, singing at the tops of their syrinxes[2] from neighbouring bushes, jerking their long tails back and forth in crazy semaphore. "*Chiliwip! Chiliwip! Chiliwip!*", the standoff continues for several minutes, both sides posturing and displaying, neither giving way. Finally, one of the males edges a subtle distance away, the noise gradually ebbs, and relative peace reigns once more.

On a *Prosopis* bush I spot a large cluster of black ants. I step forward to investigate and see that there are many such clusters, each around a little group of treehoppers[3]. The treehoppers (alternatively known as cowbugs) are coloured brown and black, and have horn-like structures curving out of either side of their heads. They are busy sucking sap out of the plant tissues, while the ants hover around and tend to them. Treehoppers and their relatives excrete a sugar-rich fluid called honeydew, and ants eagerly consume this. I carefully jostle a twig and the ants go into a frenzy, the large soldiers among them opening their impressive jaws, fierce cowherds ready to defend their precious livestock.

Blister beetles are everywhere now. I have read that they are called this because, when disturbed, they ooze an oily blister-inducing fluid out of the joints of their legs. I finally convince myself that these blisters can't be too painful, and screw up the courage to pick a beetle up. Nothing happens. I try another beetle, and another. No fluid. Eventually I find one that has read the same book as I. Little yellow droplets appear on its black legs as if by magic. I smear a few drops on the inside of my forearm and wait expectantly. Nothing. I find another cooperative beetle and use my other arm. Over the next few days I cajole five hapless beetles into participating in my experiment, but am not rewarded by a single blister. Perhaps only some people react to the chemicals in the fluid, and I'm not one of them. The experiment continues, and I am on the lookout for volunteers to help test this hypothesis. I fear that I am getting a little obsessive about these beetles...

In contrast with the hustle and bustle surrounding them, Icrisat's Grey Herons conduct themselves in an altogether more dignified manner. Several herons have built nests on the tops of the many Palmyra palms near Red Lake. There is a single adult on each of these nests, some sitting and presumably incubating their eggs, others perched ramrod-straight, surveying the scene from their vantage points high above the ground. I look a little closer at one of the nests, and yes!, there are two chicks on it. The chicks look rather comical: the feathers on the crown stick out at different angles, and the nestlings have the overall rumpled look of having just rolled out of bed. Some nests are evidently still being built. At one, one member of a pair stays on the nest while the other goes out on stick-hunting forays. When, with a stick or a small branch it alights on the nest, it raises its crest in a curious display before transferring its find to the other bird, whodelicately arranges it in a suitable spot. Large Cormorants also find these palms suitable for nesting. Unlike most of the herons, whose nests are right on top of the crown of their tree, the cormorants seem to prefer spots in among the Palmyra fronds and so their nests are harder to detect and to observe. Also unlike the herons, the cormorants are quite noisy, and the nesting colony reverberates with their continuous low, guttural jabber. But the noisiest of all are the Black Ibises, who wheel around the palms exclaiming a loud and plaintive lament to all who care to hear. Their calls strike me as being especially haunting and spine-tingling in the evening – or perhaps the thickening light and gathering night makes it only appear so.

And what about the little blackthroated weavers, whose nests were washed away in a July flood? A small number started nesting again a little under a month after that unfortunate catastrophe. Things were going well and several nests had eggs or chicks. Then came three days of steady rain and the water level rose in the ditches, higher and higher, until it covered the openings of the entrances to the nests. Chicks starved, eggs remained unbrooded, and when the water receded, only one nest with eggs had survived. But the show must go on, and these resilient birds are showing signs of bouncing back yet again. Perhaps the next month will bring better luck for them.

[1] Suhel carries out his fieldwork on weaverbirds at the International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics, Patancheru, A.P.

[2] syrinx: the vocal organ of birds, located at the base of the windpipe (trachea).

[3] treehoppers: insects in the Family Membracidae. Order Homoptera. Also in this order are aphids, common sap-sucking pests of cultivated plants.

CROW AND KITE DEATHS AT VANASTHALI MUNICIPAL GARBAGE DUMP

Siraj A. Taher

About 15km East of Hyderabad city, on the Vijaywada highway, is the Mahavir Harin Vanasthali—a national park. Established in 1975 by the A.P. Forest Dept at a "*Shikárgáh*" (hunting grounds) of the former rulers of the erstwhile Hyderabad State, it was to be a sanctuary for Blackbuck and Cheetal. ...*continued on page 4*

LETTER FROM AN INSECT-HUNTING ORNITHOLOGIST—37

"Since its success and survival are the only measures of an organism's degree of adaptation to its environment, the fact that a species has become extinct also demonstrates that it was not well enough adapted. The adaptation to an island environment is an unusually difficult one for a species to make. In the first place, the immigrant individuals were originally part of the mainland population, and were therefore adapted to the mainland environment. They cannot, therefore, already be adapted to the different conditions of the island. Secondly, if the colonists are few in number, they can include only a very small part of the genetic variation that provide the mainland population with the flexibility to cope with environmental change; this is sometimes known as the '*founder principle*'. Finally, small populations are also far more susceptible to random non-adaptive changes in their genetic make-up. Since it is less likely to be closely adapted to its environment, a small population is also more liable to chance extinction.

"A species which can make use of a wide variety of food is therefore at an advantage on an island, for its maximum possible population also will be greater than that of a species with more restricted food preferences. The advantage of this will be especially great in a small island, in which the possible population sizes are in any case smaller. This is probably the reason why, for example, though on the larger islands of the Galápagos group both the medium-sized finch *Geospiza fortis* and the small *G. fulginosa* can co-exist, on some of the smaller islands of the group there is only a single form of intermediate size."

[Lack, D. (1969) Subspecies and sympatry in Darwin's finches. *Evolution*, **23**, 252-263.]

"Chance extinction is also a particular danger for the predators in the fauna, since their numbers must always be far lower than those of the species upon which they prey. As a result, island faunas tend to be unbalanced in their composition, containing fewer varieties of predator than a similar mainland area. This in turn reinforces the fundamental lack of variety of the animal and plant life on an island, which is due to the hazards involved in entry and colonization. The complex interactions of continental communities containing a rich and varied fauna and flora act as a buffer that can cope with occasional fluctuations in the density of different species, and even with temporary local extinction of a species. This resilience is lacking in the simple island communtiy, and so the chance extinction of one species may have serious effects and lead to the extinction of other species. All these factors increase the rate at which island species may become extinct.

"The most famous natural example of the destruction of a biota and its subsequent re-establishment followed the explosion of the island of Krakatoa in 1883. By 1908, 13 species had colonized the island. When further collections were made in 1919-21, the total bird species had risen to 31, but two of the species found in 1908 were not collected or seen. By 1932-34, the total number of species (30) had remained almost stable, suggesting that this represents the equilibrium number for the island, but five species found previously were now absent. These figure suggest a rate of extinction of 0.2-0.4 species per year, i.e. that one species becomes extinct every 2-5 years—and the real figure may be higher than this, since it may be that a species could become extinct and reappear by recolonization between one collection period and the next. The figures were not very different from the extinction rate of 0.8-1.6 species per year predicted by MacArthur and Wilson's mathematical analysis. However, Williams' studies on the ecology of colonization by the iguanid lizard *Anolis* in the West Indies suggests that extinction rates of terrestrial animals may be lower, since new waves of immigration, leading to competition and extinction, are far less frequent than in birds."

[Williams, E.E. (1969) The ecology of colonization as seen in the zoogeography of anoline lizards on small islands. *Q. Rev. Biol.* **44**, 345-389.]

[C. Barry Cox & Peter D. Moore, 1980, "Biogeography: an ecological and evolutionary approach," pp. 123-124, 127-128, 139.]

Equilibrium and extinction, as factors of evolution, are what I will try to explain and highlight in this Letter. I will do this mostly by using select quotations from texts I value and which have helped me understand nature and biological phenomena. Very few bird watchers and other naturalists realize that their interest lies in the realm of Science. Unless they comprehend the scientific method, ideally through a formal education, or through the guidance of a good, reputed scientist experienced in natural history and in field biology, they will always fall short of grasping the essentials. Most will then fall prey to unscientific sentimentalism and conservation hype, which will take them away from the truth and towards a ritualistic 'belief', not reason.

The quotes from Cox & Moore's fine textbook reproduced above will enable you to get a reasonably concise and clear idea of what equilibrium in an ecosystem or 'island' habitat means and also how extinctions occur. The Danish ornithologist Jon Fjeldså, an authority on South American (Neotropical Region) avifaunas, thus concludes his paper on "Biogeographical patterns and evolution of the avifauna of relict high-altitude woodlands of the Andes" (in Steenstrupia, 18: 9-62; 1992): "While most open-land birds of the high Andes are widespread, most woodland birds have patchy or restricted distributions. Despite the strong influence of man in interrupting the natural distributions, both the disjunct and the endemic distributions describe some distinctive patterns that probably reflect biogeographic processes that happened long before man entered the scene. The analysis of these patterns indicates that speciation required a strong geographic isolation, furthermore, that specializations to the high-altitude woodlands happened mainly by isolation in rather small woodland refuges...Such specializations make the endemic species vulnerable to habitat changes, and some of them are unsuited to compete with the regional biota outside of the stable refuge. This would explain why past refugia remain detectable today as areas with peak densities of species [the so-called 'hot spots' of today's quasi-scientific lingo—K.G.] with restricted distributions and at the same time being hot-spots for finding populations of many vulnerable or extinction-prone ['threatened' in conservation terminology — K.G.] species."

When I was involved with a research project to inventory and document the tiger beetle ("six-legged tigers"!) fauna of India, funded by the Smithsonian Institution and led by David Pearson (then at Pennsylvania State University), Dave had given me his paper on "Historical factors and bird species richness" (pp. 441-452, in Biological diversification in the tropics. Columbia University Press, New York; 1982) which needs to be quoted here. Incidentally, during the six years of that project on Indian sub-continent Cicindelidae (Coleoptera), we did field work all over India and were able to find, surprisingly, all of the then

known 125 species of a single large genus *Cicindela* (24 subgenera, 1 described newly) but, again unexpectedly, also another 26 unknown and undescribed species, which were later named by Acciavatti & Pearson in 1989 (Annals of Carnegie Museum, 58: 77-356). This shows that at least in insects, provided the relatively small life-habitats of each species are still existent, the threat of extinction is not yet imminent in most insect taxa that are not too specialized. Pearson wrote: "THE QUESTION OF number of species in different habitats has been a focal point for much of the research on bird community structure over the last twenty years. Search for the cause(s) of observed patterns of species richness and distribution has involved several approaches...Although still largely dependent on assumptions of competition, MacArthur and Wilson (1967), rekindled interest in historical factors (Mayr 1963 and others) through their potential influence on species numbers on islands. At equilibrium (saturation) competition, island size, distance from mainland species pool to island (immigration/extinction rates), and size of mainland species pool have been considered important in determining the number of species maintained on an island or island-like area. Dispersion ability together with random encounters are both involved in colonization (Simberloff 1978). Interactions between colonizing and established species often result in the exclusion of the colonizing species (Simberloff & Wilson 1969). Many of the established species are conferred distinct competitive advantage merely by being in the area first. Additional patterns of evolutionary adaptations, correlated with time a species has been in an isolated area (taxon cycle), are theorized to involve competition. These patterns lead to specialization and eventually endemism (Ricklefs & Cox 1972) on the oldest islands."

Reverting again to Cox & Moore (1980: 213, 216-217), we learn that: "It was around 9000 B.C. that a revolutionary cultural change occurred in south-west Asia which was to have a profound effect upon the history of man and of our planet...The domestication of plants and animals represents a turning point in the history of life upon this planet. For the first time in the course of evolution, one of the products of evolution was utilizing the principles of evolution to his own advantage. In breeding domesticated organisms, as Darwin readily recognized, man was replacing natural selection with his own volitional selection of those characters which best suited his requirements. In this way he became able to control both the course and, to some extent, the speed of the evolutionary process...man had begun to create an artificial ecosystem around himself over which he would have control and to which he would no longer be subject."

In summary, I would like to quote the holistic viewpoint of Prof. Emeritus M.S. Mani (1974, Ecology and Biogeography in India, pp. 719-720) who wrote: "Human interference with any single factor, however small, completely upsets this delicately balanced mechanism and leads to irreversible changes. The changes introduced by man even in a small part of an immense ecosystem by deforestation and agriculture thus tend to be permanent and eventually involve the entire ecosystem...An ecosystem is as much an indivisible and integrated unit as a human body and it evolves as a whole, in much the same way a complex multicellular body of an animal evolves. The reactions of any species in the ecosystem affect all other species and the ecosystem as a whole. From the stand point of biogeography, the fauna is an indivisible whole it shrinks or increases, retracts or advances and evolves as a whole. We may, for the sake of convenience, study a single group, just as we examine any individual tissue cells of our body. In evolution it is not, however, individual tissues or groups that are important, but the whole organism and the whole fauna...It is also remarkable that the marked discontinuity, characteristic of the distribution of single and often ecologically and taxonomically highly specialized groups, largely merges into an almost continuous distribution (Fig. 160, 161) and even practically disappears in the case of the entire fauna. The discontinuity must, therefore, be considered as only an impoverishment, but not absolute absence in the intervening areas (Fig. 162)."

[**Errata:** Letter 36—*Pitta* # 112, Page 4, the Errata should read "déclassé", not "declassi".]

—Dr Kumar Ghorpadé, 1861 Bethel Street, Bangalore 560 043, India & varanus.kg@lycos.com

...continued from page 2

Sometime soon thereafter the Municipal Corporation of Hyderabad (MCH) started dumping garbage and refuse from the city as well as the offal, carcasses and remains from the city slaughter houses and chicken centres on a piece of land near the park. Soon this became a haven for crows, kites, vultures and other scavengers, including dogs. In the early 80's all the four varieties of vultures (Long-billed, White-backed, Scavenger and King) were seen in thousands. About 70% of these were white-backed, 15% long-billed and the scavenger and king made up the rest. With time, the dump kept growing and in spite of the stench and filth, the BSAP continued to visit the area and the vultures could be seen in very large numbers right through the 80's. The Bombay Natural History Society's (BNHS) Aviation Hazard Project Team sighted more than 3,000 vultures in the 80's.

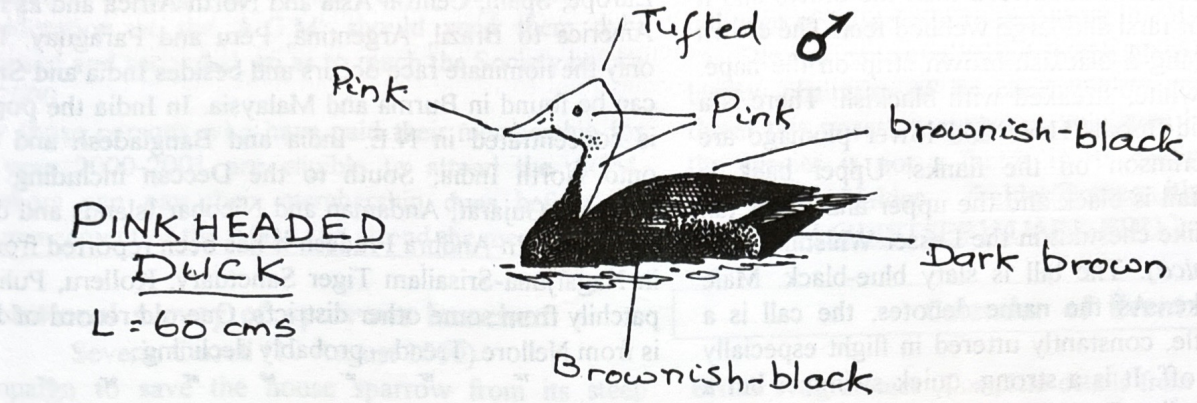
For a long time we did not go to this place and in 1998 when the BNHS sounded the "vulture alarm" some of us again went to have a look at the garbage dump and lo and behold, the vultures were gone. Nother seemed to have changed except that almost no vultures could be seen (8-10 birds), some kites and lots of crows. Thus the situation remained.

Between 10-12 September 2000, the curator of National Parks, A.P. Forest Dept., noticed about 20 dead crows (*Corvus* sp.) on the garbage and some dying or dead kites (*Milvus migrans*) in the park perimeter. Alerted, the APFD has taken steps to investigate the matter and determine the cause/s of death. The carcasses are being sent to the Veterinary Biological Research Institute (VBRI), Hyderabad for analysis.

It is common knowledge and also reported that the MCH has been spraying some chemicals or pesticides on the garbage dump to keep off the stench, prevent spread of disease by killing flies and avoid public outcry. ...*Continued on page 6*

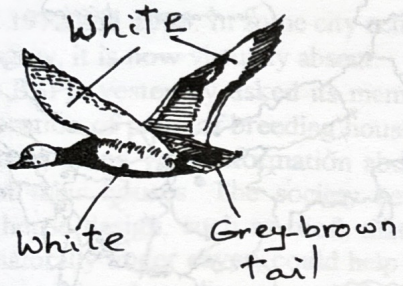
FIELD CRAFT *By* Siraj A. Taher & Sachin Jaltare

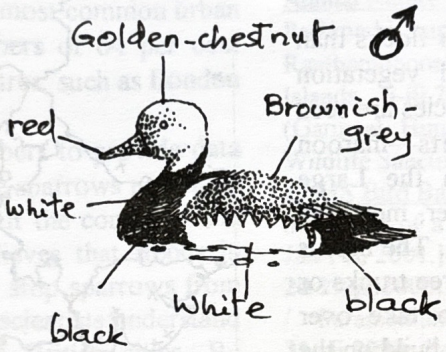
GEESE & DUCKS (Family: Anatidae): This is a very diverse and large group of waterbirds of varying sizes and colours, having flat beaks, webbed feet and short tails. These birds are mostly seen in large flocks or small parties. The regularity of their appearance between October and March every year throughout India on all types of inland water-bodies is a spectacular example of bird migration. Most species coming to A.P. are migratory, barring four.

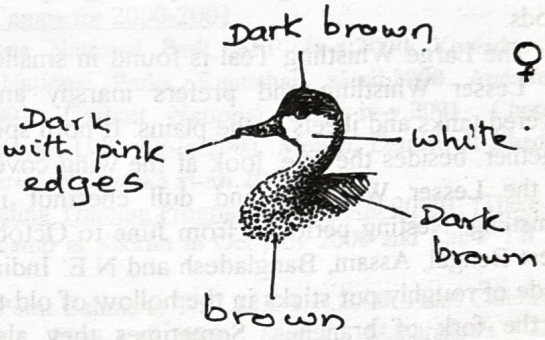


PINK HEADED DUCK

L = 60 cms

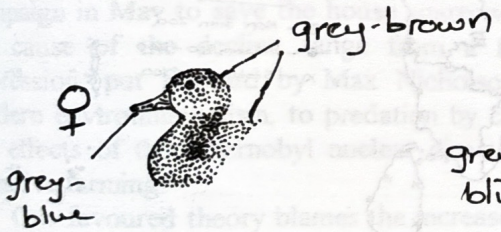






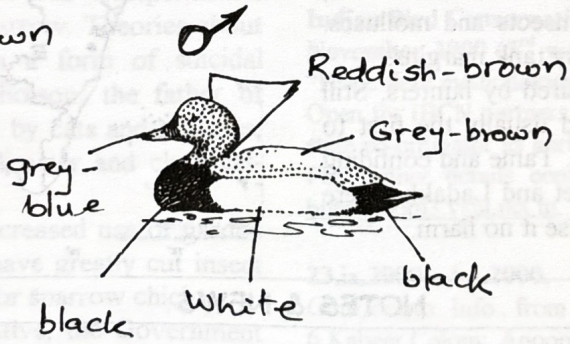
REDCRESTED POCHARD

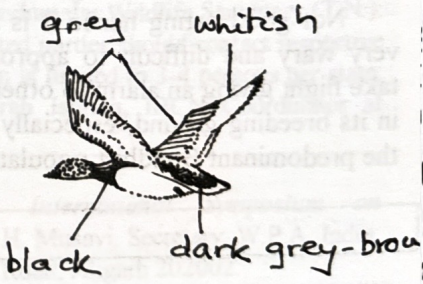
L = 50 cms

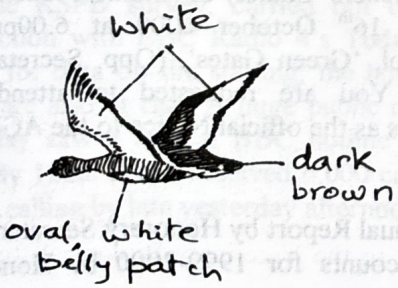


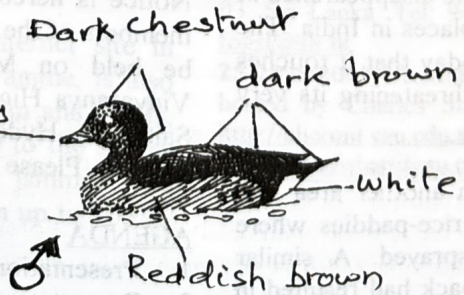
COMMON POCHARD

L = 45 cms









WHITE-EYED POCHARD

(OR) FERRUGINOUS DUCK

L = 40 cms

SPOTLIGHT: Large Whistling Teal / Fulvous Whistling Duck *Dendrocygna bicolor* By Siraj A. Taher

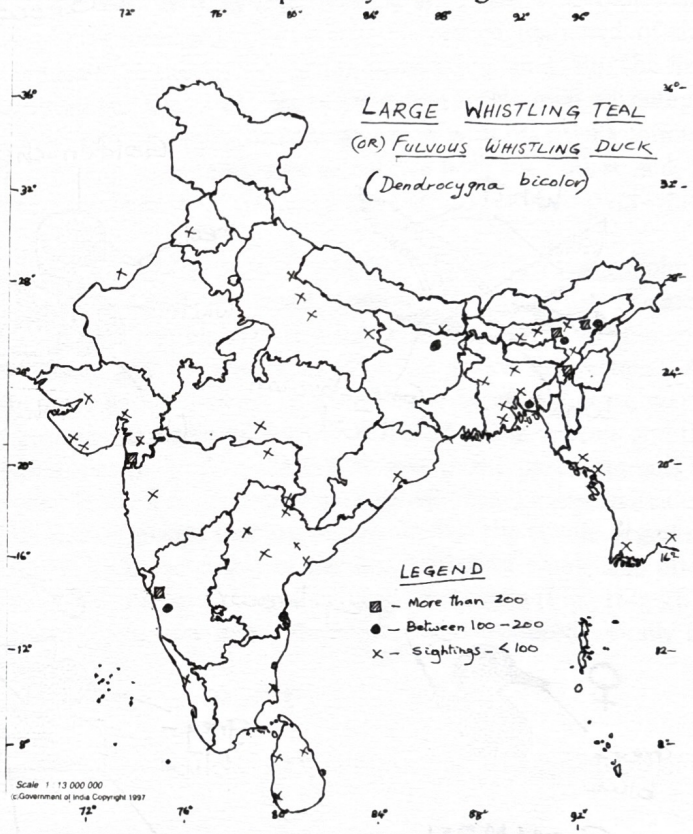
This column focuses on birds that are in the Red Data Book of BirdLife International as threatened / highly threatened species. Readers are requested to send information about these birds to the Society.

It is a medium sized duck, more upright than any other, as its legs are placed more backward than the others and it has long and stout tarsi and large webbed feet. The crown is ferruginous becoming a blackish-brown strip on the nape. The middle-neck is white, streaked with blackish. There is a whitish collar on mid-throat. Head and lower plumage are ochre, turning to crimson on the flanks. Upper back is brownish-black, the tail is black and the upper and lower tail coverts are white unlike chestnut in the Lesser Whistling Teal (*Dendrocygna javanica*). The bill is slaty blue-black. Male and female look alike. As the name denotes, the call is a regular unclear whistle, constantly uttered in flight especially when the bird takes off. It is a strong, quick swimmer but a poor flier. Large Whistling Teal, like the Lesser Whistling, is a resident and a local migrant, depending upon drought and floods.

The Large Whistling Teal is found in smaller flocks than the Lesser Whistling and prefers marshy and vegetation covered tanks and jheels in the plains. If both species are seen together, besides the size, look at the wing coverts—maroon in the Lesser Whistling and dull chestnut in the Large Whistling. Nesting period is from June to October, mostly in West Bengal, Assam, Bangladesh and N.E. India. The nest is made of roughly put sticks in the hollow of old tree trunks or in the fork of branches. Sometimes they also take over disused nests of crows and kites and occasionally build on the ground in the vegetation around marshes and tanks. Eggs usually number 6-8 and are white in colour. Incubation period is 30-32 days. Food consists of grains, shoots and tubers, small crustaceans and reptiles, aquatic insects and molluscs. Walks well and sometimes graze on grassy tank margins.

Not good eating hence it is not desired by hunters. Still very wary and difficult to approach and usually the first to take flight giving an alarm to other ducks. Tame and confiding in its breeding ground, especially in Tibet and Ladakh where the predominant Buddhist population cause it no harm.

The extralimital distribution of this duck is from northern Europe, Spain, Central Asia and North Africa and as far as S. America to Brazil, Argentina, Peru and Paraguay. In Asia, only the nominate race occurs and besides India and Sri Lanka can be found in Burma and Malaysia. In India the population is concentrated in N.E. India and Bangladesh and spreads onto North India, South to the Deccan including Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Andaman and Nicobar Islands and down to Sri Lanka. In Andhra Pradesh it has been reported from tanks in Nagarjuna-Srisailam Tiger Sanctuary, Kolleru, Pulicat and patchily from some other districts. One old record of Jerdon's is from Nellore. Trend—probably declining.



NOTES & NEWS

...Continued from page 4.

A detailed post-mortem report and culture analysis is awaited. Maybe it will also give a clue to the disappearance of vultures from Andhra Pradesh and other places in India. The garbage dump has become so extensive today that it touches the boundary fencing of the park and is threatening its very existence.

STOP PRESS

As we go to press, news has come from another area that several wild birds (waders) have died in rice-paddies where heavy doses of pesticides have been sprayed. A similar incident in the same paddies some years back had resulted in the death of a few wild ducks. A detailed report will be carried in the next *Pitta*.

NOTICE (Dated 18.ix.2000)

Annual General Meeting for the Year 1999-2000

Notice is hereby given that the Annual General Meeting of members of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh will be held on Monday, 16th October 2000 at 6.00pm at Vidyaranya High School, 'Green Gates', (Opp. Secretariat), Saifabad, Hyderabad. You are requested to attend the meeting. Please treat this as the official Notice to the AGM.

AGENDA

1. Presentation of Annual Report by Honorary Secretary.
2. Presentation of accounts for 1999-2000 by Honorary Secretary.
3. Appointment of auditors for the period 1st April 2000 to 31st March 2001 and fixing of their remuneration.
4. Any other business.

Aasheesh Pittie (Honorary Secretary)

NOTES

1. Copies of the Balance Sheet and Income and Expenditure Account will be given to members at the A.G.M.
2. Members wishing to place any resolutions for consideration at the A.G.M. should send them duly proposed and seconded, so as to reach the Society before 6.x.2000.
3. Only those persons who have paid their membership for the year 2000-2001 are eligible to attend the AGM. Members can pay their membership dues before the commencement of the AGM and attend the meeting.

National survey of sparrows launched

Severin Carrell (10 August 2000)

The campaign to save the house sparrow from its steep decline in numbers yesterday received a major boost when the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds launched a national survey. House sparrows, once one of the most common urban birds in Britain, suffered a fall in numbers of 64 per cent between 1972 and 1996. In some city centres, such as London and Glasgow, it is now virtually absent.

The RSPB yesterday asked its members to provide data on the location of pairs of breeding house sparrows nesting in their homes, along with information about the condition and design of their houses. The society believes that trends in modern house design, such as roofs that stop sparrows from nesting naturally under eaves, could help scientists understand why the species has disappeared from British cities. By contrast, the bird still thrives in other major European cities such as Paris and Madrid.

The survey follows the launch of *The Independent*'s campaign in May to save the house sparrow. Theories about the cause of the decline range from a form of suicidal depression, put forward by Max Nicholson, the father of modern environmentalism, to predation by cats and magpies, the effects of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster and chemical-intensive farming.

One favoured theory blames the increased use of garden pesticides, which naturalists fear may have greatly cut insect numbers, removing a vital food source for sparrow chicks.

Following *The Independent*'s initiative, the Government unveiled a two-year research programme, as part of a wider survey on the countryside, into the decline of the sparrow and the starling, whose numbers dropped by 56 per cent between 1973 and 1997.

The RSPB survey, carried out on its internet site in conjunction with BBC Radio 4's Today programme, is also asking for data on the starling, the house martin and swifts, which are also at risk. A huge public response to the survey yesterday saw a special BBC hotline number jammed with calls. By 10am it had received 6,000 calls, with up to 10,000 people calling by late yesterday afternoon.

Previous RSPB surveys into a range of garden birds suggest that sparrow numbers now average four per garden, compared with eight per garden in 1990. The decline seems to have suddenly accelerated in the mid-1990s. Conservationists also blame the Government for officially listing the sparrow, alongside the starling, as a pest because of the damage it can cause to crops. Rentokil, the pest control company, devotes a full page of its website to sparrows.

Despite concerns raised in the House of Lords by Lord Hardy, chairman of its conservation committee, about the threat this poses to sparrows, ministers insist that control of the species is not a factor in its decline. [Contributed by Francisco Valdes fvaldes@omega.itlaguna.edu.mx on: ORNITH-L@LISTSERV.UARK.EDU.]

Calendar of Events

BNHS Programmes (Complete details from BNHS 022-2821811. Camps only for members of BNHS, nature-walks & talks open to all):

Annual Nature Camps for 2000-2001:

Pachmarhi/Satpura National Park, M.P. **ix-x.2000**. Keoladeo & Ranthambhore National Parks, Rajasthan, **xi-xii.2000**. Andaman Islands **ii-iii.2001**. Corbett National Park **iv-v.2001**. Chopta (Garhwal, Himalaya), U.P. **viii-ix.2001**. Molem, Dandeli & Bhadra Wildlife Sanctuaries, Karnataka **xi-xii.2001**.

BNHS Bird Banding Training Programme for 2000-20001. [There is likelihood of a camp at Sikkim in Oct-Nov 2000 and Kabar Tal in Jan-Feb 2001.]

20-29.ix.2000: Point Calimere, T.N. **28.x-6.xi.2000:** Point Calimere / Parambikulam. **25.xi-3.xii.2000:** Nashik, Maharashtra. **22-31.xii.2000:** Point Calimere / Pulicat, A.P. **20-29.i.2001:** Tirupati, A.P. / Kabartal, Bihar. **1-28.ii.2001:** Andaman & Nicobar Islands. **20-29.iii.2001:** Point Calimere.

Indian Bird Conservation Network (IBCN) Programme:
November 2000 (3rd week): Southern Region training workshop in "Basic field methodology," at Mudumalai Wildlife Sanctuary (T.N.). Open for IBCN partners. Interested parties should contact respective state co-ordinator as participation is limited to 3-4 persons per state. For further details contact: Farah Ishtiaq, IBCN Coordinator at bnhs@bom3.vsnl.net.in.

23.ix.2000—1.x.2000, Nepal: *International Symposium on Galliformes*. Info., from Prof. A.H. Musavi, Secretary, W.P.A. India, 6 Kabeer Colony, Anoop Shahar Road, Aligarh 202002.

23-29.x.2000, Kandy, Sri Lanka: *PASOC 2000, Second Pan Asian Ornithological Congress*. Contact: PASSOC 2000 Secretariat, Field Ornithology Group of Sri Lanka, University of Colombo, Colombo 03, Sri Lanka. Tel: 94-075-342609. Fax: 94-075-337644. E-mail: fogsl@slt.lk.

25-28.ix.2001, Australia: *Australian Ornithological Conference*, hosted by Charles Sturt University in Bathurst, NSW. Website: http://clio.mit.csu.edu.au/aoc2001. For details contact Dr Andrew M. Fisher at afisher@csu.edu.au.

BIRDING NOTES Compiled by Aasheesh Pittie

This column publishes birding notes in brief telegraphic form, from **Andhra Pradesh, Goa, Haryana, Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra, Punjab, Rajasthan & Tamil Nadu** on interesting and significant sightings and behaviour like breeding, feeding, migration, nesting, *etc*. Notes on flowering and fruiting trees and their relationship with birds are also welcome. English names and classification follow, S.D. Ripley's *A Synopsis of the Birds of India and Pakistan* (1982, 2nd ed.) and scientific nomenclature, T. Inskipp, N. Lindsey & W. Duckworth's *An Annotated Checklist of the Birds of the Oriental Region* (1996). Unless specified, all observations are for 2000. Abbreviations, Contributors, Notes, Regional Referees, *etc*., are at the end. For selection of breeding criteria 'Probable, Possible, Confirmed', see *Pitta* # 82, February 1998, p. 4.

ANDHRA PRADESH

GUNTUR DISTRICT

Uppalapadu Tank 9.ix (KMR)

LITTLE CORMORANT 100; NIGHT HERON 200; CATTLE EGRET 800; OPENBILL STORK 4000, CB N 600; GLOSSY IBIS 1200; WHITE IBIS 600, CB N 250.

ABBREVIATIONS: Ab-abundant; ad-adult/s; br-breeding; C-common/ly; CB-confirmed breeding; const-construction/ing; *c*.-approxim-ately; disp-display/ing; F-female; flt-flight; fly-family; freq-frequent/ly; hrd-heard; id-identify/ied; imm-immature; inc-include/ing; Is-Island; juv-juvenile; LM-local migrant; M-male; mat-material; N-nest/ing/s; POB-possible breeding; PRB-probable breeding; plm-plumage; RF-Reserve Forest; Resp-respectively; Tlk-Taluk; vil-village; WL-wildlife; yng-young.

CONTRIBUTORS: K. Mrutyumjaya Rao (KMR).

REGIONAL REFEREES: Andhra Pradesh: Aasheesh Pittie; Goa: Heinz Lainer; Haryana: Harkirat S. Sangha; Karnataka: J.N. Prasad; Kerala: P.O. Nameer; Maharashtra: Nitin Jamdar; Punjab: H.S. Sangha; Rajasthan: H.S. Sangha; Tamil Nadu: V. Santharam.

CONTACT CALLS

"Herewith I am sending bird observation particulars of **Uppalapadu Tank (Guntur District)** dated 9.ix.2000 (see *Birding Notes* above). This is the first time for **glossy ibis** to visit the tank in such large numbers. The tank is still having a bright future for development. But the water problem has to be solved." **—K. Mrutyumjaya Rao, Kakinada, Andhra Pradesh**

"I would like to add that Dr Kumar Ghorpadé's letters in *Pitta* on Taxonomy were too hard to understand, but recent letters on Biogeography are very interesting." **—Zaibin, A.P., Malappuram District, Kerala**

"I have gone through the article *Spotlight*, in *Pitta* 112, August 2000, describing the distribution range of the **Bar-headed Goose *Anser indicus***. In the state of **Madhya Pradesh**, the distribution has been shown along the Narbada and Chambal rivers. I would like to add few more sites, based on my own sighting records as follows: In my two years stay near the Son River, Sidhi district, Riwa area, flocks of 100-200 birds were regularly seen, in winter at various locations in Son river, mostly near Sidhi, Jogdarha Gharial Sanctuary and elsewhere. The species is a regular visitor here along with scores of other migratory species in large numbers, and on this account, the Son River was proposed by me as an IBA (Important Bird Area) site. In my opinion the species is comparatively safer here. In the Chhattisgarh region, the species can be categorised as uncommon. It has never been in abundance in last 30 years, smaller flocks or stray birds were seen in river Mahanadi, and other larger bodies, in Raipur, Bilaspur and Raigarh districts. Illegal trapping, shooting and loss of habitats being the main causes for depletion in visiting birds' population. The sandy beds of rivers Mahanadi, Sheonath and other rivers are extensively used for vegetable cultivation, for which the preparations start from December, thus depriving the migratory birds of much needed safe roosts and feeding grounds." **—A.M.K. Bharos, Raipur, Madhya Pradesh**

LITERARY *WRENDITIONS*

"In South India it (**Red-wattled Lapwing *Vanellus indicus***), is recorded to sleep on its back with its legs upwards, and the Indian proverb '*Titihri se asman thama jaega, &c.*,' 'can the Pee-wit support the Heavens,' is applied to a man who undertakes some task far above his strength." [Jerdon, T.C. (1864): *The Birds of India*. Vol. 3. George Wyman and Co., Publishers. Calcutta.]

THE *cachinnans* CORNER

"A male bellbird calls from a favored perch on a broken-off branch. If an intruder lands on the same branch, the first bird hops over the interloper to get an inside position, then edges him toward the end of the limb. The intruder is driven to the tip of the branch, where he leans out over the end, barely clinging to his last inch of tree. The first bird then leans over, opens his beak, puts it to the second bird's ear, an dbegins working up what those who know bircalls say is probably the loudest call in the bird world. The muscles on his neck and upper back swell and contract. His chest heaves. Finally, he lets loose a great *bonk* that can be heard for more than half a mile. It's enough to knock the intruder off the end of the branch nearly every time, if not dissuade him from the ritual, whichis often repeated moments later." [Stap, Don (2000): Bonk, bonk—it's a Three-wattled Bellbird. *Audubon*. 102(3): 98-103.]

For Private Circulation Only

For information, write to: Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh, PO Box 45, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad 500034, India.
Editors: Aasheesh Pittie (3350683) & Siraj A Taher (6612608). **E-mail**: aasheesh@hd1.vsnl.net.in
Membership (Rs): Admission=20; Ordinary=100, Student=25 per annum; Life=1,000. *Outstation cheques not accepted.*

PITTA

Bulletin of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh No 114: October 2000

PROGRAMME

FIELD OUTING: 8.x.2000: Narsapur Reserved Forest, Medak District.
MEETING: 16-x-2000, 6 p.m.: Annual General Body Meeting of the Society. For Notice & Agenda see *Pitta* #114, pp. 6-7. Vidyaranya High School, Opp., Secretariat, Saifabad, Hyderabad.

NOTES & NEWS

Field trip to Narsapur Reserve Forest

Kiran Katikaneni

I had prepared for this trip for three weeks for the idea of visiting a forest habitat, after a long hiatus, seemed the right kind of stimulus to the stressed-out mind and overworked body. We started from Punjagutta X roads at 6.30am.

The drive to Narsapur Reserve Forest was very pleasant. Wide roads with the green belt on both sides and an overcast sky were more than we had asked for. We spotted a solitary Coucal perched boldly on a tall stone pillar, staring nonchalantly at the passing traffic. There was a White-breasted Kingfisher too, perched on an overhead utility line within the sight of a small pond.

On reaching the temple, our parking area, we learnt that JVD Moorty has reached much earlier and begun birding. In the skies above the parking area there was a large party of noisy Swallows, apparently moving nowhere. A Tailorbird was heard but could not be located and we decided to head towards the forest, with Suhel leading the way.

All the time he was alert for sounds from the bushes, declaring now and then the presence of an elusive passerine. He led us into the almost dry stream-bed expecting to see a wide variety of visitors to the water. All the while my eyes were scanning the treetops to catch a glimpse of woodpeckers, four species of which are reported from this area.

Suhel spotted a solitary wagtail foraging along the sandy banks. Shafatullah wondered whether it was a Yellow Wagtail, after a quick perusal into his Collins' *Field Guide*. But Suhel explained the nuances of eclipse plumage of the Grey Wagtail. Our walk upstream took us to a large boulder strewn area. Crossing this involved hopping over puddles and exploring a way along the steep banks.

The list was growing by now and included Franklin's and Ashy Wren-Warblers, Greenish Warbler, Purple and Purple-rumped Sunbirds, Small Green Bee-eater, Tickell's Flowerpecker, Brown Flycatcher, White-eye, Indian Treepie, Common Iora, Crimson-breasted Barbet, Jungle and Grey Babblers, Roseringed and Blossom-headed Parakeets, Spotted Dove and Red-winged Bushlark.

One of the most impressive small passerines was Spotted Munia. JVD Murthy and I took our time to thouroughly enjoy it's unique facial contours. A White-breasted Kingfisher was seen flying across the stream uttering its characteristic maniacal laughter. Another noteworthy sighting was that of the White-browed Fantail Flycatcher.

Suhel was going on with his mission of educating us about every living being we ran into. His subjects included tall hardwood trees, shrubs, creepers, exotic weeds, butterflies and to cap all these, a millipede!

Just then a pair of frolicking White-bellied Drongos was sighted. At this moment an argument erupted between Moorty and Shafatullah about a woodpecker whose identity both the parties were claiming to be correct. After much debate it was agreed that each had seen a different woodpecker at the same site! As if on cue I looked into the skies and bingo there was a woodpecker overhead! Moorty identified it as a Golden-backed Woodpecker of whose amazing trapezoid shape in flight fascinated me.

The humidity was taking its toll and we decide to stop for refreshments. At the temple we spotted a gang of Small Minivets making merry on a mango tree. We then moved towards the lake for a quick glance of the shore birds before leaving. But the scene was extremely disappointing with practically no bird activity on such a large expanse of water.

As a consolation we spotted three Great Egrets, a Spotbill Duck and a large pied wader whose identity could not be established. Hoping to see the Black-backed Woodpecker we walked upto the bund. This involved trekking a hill with thorny bushes and steep slippery gravel. Midway to the bund we saw three White Wagtails enjoying the pleasant afternoon oblivious of the group of prying eyes. The birds were beautiful and Walter will take pride one day for catching them on film. From the bund we could see White-browed Bulbul, Indian Robin and Magpie-Robin. On the way back to the city we spotted a Rufous-backed Shrike and a couple of Jungle Crows.

THE FIELD MUSE: The downpour of a lifetime

Suhel Quader[1]

Early one morning in late August the heavens open and it begins to pour. In a few hours a foot of water covers the ground. Water gushes into the campus through the main storm-water drain in the south, flows into Icrisat Lake, and surges out to the north. The level rises higher and higher until the drains overflow and water spreads out over the

[1] Suhel carries out his fieldwork on weaverbirds at the International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics, Patancheru, A.P.

grasslands, flattening the vegetation with the force of its flow. Soon, much of the low-lying parts of the farm is submerged. And still the steady, heavy, crushing rain continues. When it finally stops, 510 mm of rain has fallen, an average year's entire rainfall compressed into 48 hours, the heaviest rain in a hundred years.

The waters recede rapidly and I venture out to investigate. The vegetation seems intact, except in the drains, where grass and *Typha* reeds lie uprooted. The grassland is strangely quiet. Little clues about the fate of terrestrial creatures are scattered here and there. Hundreds of ants float dead in pools of water, chains of black corpses clasped to one another with their jaws. Nests of Wren Warblers and Streaked Fantail Warblers, placed low down in a bush or a clump of grass, lie in tatters. Their contents are nowhere to be found. I stumble across the carcasses of drowned rats and smashed crabs and stranded fish far from the nearest lake or stream. And even a large Russell's Viper with a squadron of flies buzzing around it in excitement; pale larvae already hatched and wriggling and feasting on the bounty. The heronry in the palms around Red Lake is completely wiped out, a few twigs bearing sole testimony to the previous existence of a nesting colony. The nests of our blackthroated weavers? Annihilated, of course. This breeding season has been a complete disaster for these birds and I see only a few blackthroats in the month following the flood. A day after the rain stops I watch a couple of bedraggled jackals scouring the grass for a meal. Perhaps only they have managed to benefit from the catastrophe, feeding on its unfortunate victims.

Within a week, however, it seems almost like business as usual again. The air is full of song, and of birds rushing about as if trying to make up for lost time. Soon I find a Plain Wren-Warbler nest, its tiny confines bursting with indignantly hungry chicks. A Spotted Munia flies tirelessly back and forth, bringing stalks of grass to reinforce its globe-shaped nest in an *Acacia* bush. A male Purple Sunbird in non-breeding plumage sings lustily from a fence, unmindful of his inappropriate attire. Plants thrust their flowers into the sky, and these are eaten by hoards of hungry blister beetles[2].

There are also several new and conspicuous additions to the fauna soon after the flood. The first migrants are here! Marsh and Montague's Harriers start trickling in, and by the middle of September they are all around, patrolling low over the grassland, their heads moving from side to side, scanning the terrain beneath them with great care. In the evenings they congregate on a bare patch of ground or on a freshly ploughed field. As the sky darkens more and more individuals come in to roost, looking like large bats suddenly gone terrestrial... An invasion of Stone Chats starts a few days after the harriers. Suddenly they are everywhere; little earth-coloured birds, the males with handsome black faces. An informal census one morning has them outnumbering the resident Pied Bush Chats by 3 to 1[3]. The occasional waterbird also turns up. One day a pair of Garganey Teals; on another, two Curlews, looking lost and out-of-place by the side of a pond no larger than an ambitious puddle.

The regular inhabitants are, of course, still here. Parties of Streaked Fantail Warblers flit around; the newly-fledged among them are delightful little bundles of feathers. They are still a little uncertain on the wing and apart from very short bursts of flight they hop from stem to stem in the thick grass, pausing now and then to shrug off the morning dew and straighten a displaced feather. Early one morning, with a thick mist shrouding the grass, a Jungle Cat and I almost run into each other. Both of us halt abruptly ten metres apart on the jeep track. The cat appears unconcerned. It stands motionless and glares balefully at me through unblinking yellow eyes. I marvel at the length of its legs—its body is carried much higher than that of its domestic cousins. Time seems to slow down and almost stop as each of us waits for the other to make the next move. A few interminable seconds later the cat saunters off into the grass, passes around me and emerges on the track behind. Perhaps it is hungry, and has a young warbler in mind for breakfast. I set off with a spring to my step: the morning has begun very well indeed.

"...This summer during an expedition lead by E.E. Syroechkovski, we managed to catch and ring 8 adult and 6 young **Spoon-billed Sandpipers (*Eurynorhynchus pygmaeus*)** in the breeding area in Chukotka (Russia) with a light green flag.

Now, especially Hongkong birders, or those of you looking in Korea or other places with Spoon-billed Sandpipers, please look out for light green flags.

The actual situation is according to our (E.E. Syroechkovski, P. Tomkovich and others) surveys very serious and much worse than expected. Many areas, earlier known as breeding sites were completely deserted. The total population is assumed to be even much less than the previously published 1600-2500 pairs." [Christoph Zöckler, World Conservation Monitoring Centre (UNEP-WCMC), 219 Huntingdon Road, Cambridge, U.K. CB3 0DL. Email: chrisz@unep-wcmc.org. http://www.unep-wcmc.org/arctic/data/birds/ (on EUROBIRDNET@listserv.funet.fi)].

[Editors' Note: The Spoon-billed Sandpiper is a straggler on India's East coast, and readers should keep a lookout for green-flagged birds.]

Long-billed Vulture (*Gyps indicus*)

"Although consistently treated as a single species throughout the 20th Century, the Long-billed Vulture *Gyps indicus* is comprised of two extremely distinct taxa *Gyps* [*i.*] *indicus* (Scopoli, 1786) and *Gyps* [*i.*] *tenuirostris* (Gray, 1844). These taxa are rather similar in size and proportions, but otherwise differ to the extent that we seriously doubt that they are sister taxa, and we consider it self-evident that both are full biological species. ...*continued on page 7*

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[2] among plants currently flowering, and being attacked by blister beetles are *Abutilon indicum*, *Sesbania bispinosa*, and *Alysicarpus longifolius*.

[3] in an earlier version of this essay, I wrote down an off-the-cuff estimate of 20:1. I was a little uncomfortable presenting this estimate without having done any actual counts, and so I kept track of the numbers I saw in 2 ½ hours one morning, and counted 19 Stone Chats and 7 Pied Bush Chats. I think that the reason I made such an absurd estimate earlier was that I had just spent a lot of time in an area where I saw the same individual Stone Chats repeatedly, and no Pied Bush Chats at all. The lesson I draw from this little episode is never to estimate numbers without counting; and if counting is impossible or impractical, to keep in mind that my estimate may be horribly wrong, no matter how reasonable it looks to me.

LETTER FROM AN INSECT-HUNTING ORNITHOLOGIST—38

"Before Darwin put forward his theory of evolution by natural selection, it was accepted that each species that we see today had always existed precisely as we now see it. God had created each one, with all its detailed adaptations, and these had remained unchanged. Fossils were merely the remains of other types of animal, each equally unchanging during its span of existence, which God had destroyed in a catastrophe (or a number of catastrophes) such as the biblical Flood.

"The explanation that Darwin actually deduced and published in 1858 is now an almost universally accepted part of the basic philosophy of biological science. Darwin realized that any pair of animals or plants produces far more offspring than would be needed simply to replace that pair: there must, therefore, be competition for survival amongst the offspring. Furthermore, these offspring are not identical with one another, but vary slightly in their characteristics. Inevitably, some of these variations will prove to be better adapted to the mode of life of the organism than others. The offspring which have these favourable characteristics will then have a natural advantage in the competition of life, and will tend to survive at the expense of their less fortunate relatives. By their survival, and eventual mating, this process of natural selection will lead to the persistence of these favourable characteristics into the next generation."

"There are... two phenomena that have to be explained, the splitting of one species into two, and the inability of these two species to breed together. As will be seen, these are really two aspects of a single problem...

"Each species is broken up... into separate populations, cut off by areas in which physical or biological factors make it difficult or impossible for the species to survive. As long as the isolation persists, each population will gradually tend to become slightly different from the others, due to the action of two forces. One of these forces lies within the animal or plant, the other lies outside it.

"The force within the organism lies in the system that is responsible for the transmission of the characters of the parents to the next generation. Within each cell lies... the nucleus, inside which is a number of... chromosomes. These chromosomes consist of a chain of large complex molecules known as genes. It is the biochemical action of these genes that is responsible for the characteristics of every cell of an individual, and thus for the characteristics of the organism as a whole... Each gene exists in a number of slightly different versions, or alleles. Taking the gene responsible for hair colour as an example, one allele might cause the hair to be brown while another might cause it to be red. Many different alleles of each gene may exist, and this is the main reason for much of the variation in structure that Darwin noted.

"The force outside the organism that aids the process is simpler. Natural selection acts to adapt the population to its surroundings. But no two patches of woodland, no two freshwater ponds, will be absolutely identical, even if they lie in the same area of country. They may differ in the precise nature of their soil or water, in their range of temperature, or their average temperature, or in the particular species of animal or plant that may become unusually rare or unusually common in that locality. Since each population has to adapt to slightly different conditions, the two populations will gradually come to differ from one another.

"Once populations have started to diverge in their genetic adaptations in this way, the foundations for the appearance of a new species have been laid... The further, vital step towards the appearance of a new species is when hybrids between the two independent populations do appear, but only along a narrow zone where the two populations meet. Such a situation suggests that, though continued interbreeding within this zone can produce a population of hybrids, these hybrids cannot compete elsewhere with either of the pure parent populations. This seems to be the situation with the woodpecker-like flickers of North America. The eastern yellow-shafted flicker, *Colaptes auratus*, does mate with the western red-shafted flicker, *C. cafer*, along a narrow 2000-mile-long stretch where the two meet, but this zone of hybridization does not seem to be spreading...

"The barrier to hybridization is known as an isolating mechanism, and it may take many forms. In animals such as birds and insects, that have complicated courtship and mating behaviour, small differences in these rituals may in themselves effectively prevent interbreeding. Sometimes the preference for the mating site may differ slightly...

"Other isolating mechanisms may not prevent mating and fertilization taking place, but instead ensure that the union is sterile."

[C. Barry Cox & Peter D. Moore, 1980, "Biogeography: an ecological and evolutionary approach", pp. 99-100, 104, 106-109.]

For the past decade or so, I have gone back to my "first love", Ornithology, in great measure, apart from still continuing with my specialist insect research which had entertained my almost undivided attention from 1975 onwards. The gift of G.M. Henry's GUIDE TO THE BIRDS OF CEYLON, by late M. Krishnan in 1955, had stirred my interest in our magnificent diversity of feathered animals, and these 40+ years of bird study in the field, library, museum and laboratory have been wonderful tutors in the science of Ornithology. Again, my specialization in the taxonomy of insects, initially focussed on the pretty "ladybirds" or lady beetles (Coleoptera: Coccinellidae) and then, through my masters, doctoral and post-doctoral tenures in academia (1973-1983) centered on hover-flies (Diptera: Syrphidae), enabled me to pick up the basics in the understanding of Nature and its denizens. Having gone through a formal education in agricultural sciences, I had the fortune of mixing the basic with the applied, and also the luck of enjoying what was essentially an 'outdoor' training, plus thousands of elevating hours in libraries stocked with the best, or near best, of much that has been documented in print on our natural history and farming. Zafar Futehally's recommendation enabled me to summarize and update our information on the six-legged creatures (Insects) that swarm our land, in the Bombay Natural History Society's ENCYCLOPEDIA OF INDIAN NATURAL HISTORY (1986), and I am now engaged in completing "The Status of Insect diversity in the Indian sub-continent" (1997, Indian Journal of Biodiversity, 1: 49-89, *et seq.*). I have also been blessed with the opportunity of learning much more about our butterflies (Lepidoptera: Rhopalocera) in the course of interacting with Harish Gaonkar (of Copenhagen, Denmark) who is now writing what I believe is one of the finest ever, very detailed and scholarly, multi-volume treatise on these winged beauties that are flapping and sailing about in India and neighbouring countries. My one regret is in not having had a parallel instruction in field botany, and adequate familiarity with the names and identities of our equally diverse flora. But, the appearance of abundantly illustrated tomes on the plants of the Tamilnad Carnatic, and the Palni Hills, by Rev. Father K.M. Matthew (1981-1988, 1996) has succeeded in invigorating and distilling my interest in the study of our country's 'green cover' which sustains all of our animal life, and ourselves (!), on land and in the waters here.

Harish Gaonkar wrote me (e-mailed—subject: "Birds and biogeography!", dated 8th February 2000), in response to my brief review (to appear, shortly, in the Newsletter for Birdwatchers) of the masterfully illustrated recent book on BIRDS OF THE INDIAN SUBCONTINENT (1998) written by Grimmett and the Inskipps, that: "Although the classical division of the world into biogeographical regions was proposed by an ornithologist [P.L. Sclater, in 1858—K.G.], birds in my view do not give much to move about (for us; they however have moved and move a lot!)".

"In your review of this 2kg book on our birds, you do not point out that these birders (or 'birdys' should I say?) are wrong in their biogeography. The division of 'Central Himalaya' to house the Nepalese flora and fauna is a quasi-biogeographical gimmick. This was started by William Doherty in the last century and followed uncritically by everybody else since. The actual boundary between the Eastern and Western Himalayan elements is the Kali—Gandaki gorge (or somewhere there)... More about this later. Otherwise, I like the book. A pity.

none of them is a systematic biologist! And Carl has finally arrived!! **We still have to do (non-Manian) biogeography** of our area. The area is far too important (I mean it in a non-nationalistic sense) to be left to a bunch of...you know what I mean?"

"**PS:** Don't bother much about Mani's biogeography. He was (is) a good ecologist (better than many in India). But alas, to be a good biogeographer, you need to be a good faunistic biologist (based on systematics) and not just have 'fine ideas'!!! Dig out Willis, who worked in Sri Lanka, whose 'Age and Area' theory might inspire you! And a dash of pan-biogeography, a dash of cladistic (or rather analytical) biogeography. Sundaland (southeast Asia) was a part of the old Gondwanaland, moving upwards to mainland (Indo-) China, creating mountain orogeny there. And butterflies (unlike birds) do not cheat!"

Though I agree Prof. Emeritus M.S. Mani was inaccurate in some of his biogeographical analyses, I still believe that most of what he wrote in his edited book on ECOLOGY AND BIOGEOGRAPHY IN INDIA (1974) did include much sound documentation and theory. The current thinking that Sundaland (the greater 'East Indies', not "southeast Asia") belonged to the southern hemisphere supercontinent Gondwanaland and 'rafted' northward wholly (or in parts) to crash into Asia (like our own '*Dravidia*' did) still needs conclusive data, I suspect. However, Harish's point that systematics is the foundation of biological research and science, and lack of grooming and grounding in taxonomy results in not-so-good biology (and ecology), is well taken.

After completing a brief review of the "Grimskipps" book, I have been engrossed in completing a serious, page-by-page (580pp. of text) and plate-by-plate (153pls) analytical review of this 'heavy' work. The lack of biosystematics training and experience of the authors—Richard Grimmett, Carol and Tim Inskipp—shows abundantly. Stuart Baker's NEW FAUNA (1922-1930) and Dillon Ripley's INDIAN HANDBOOK (1968-1974; with Sálim Ali, who was evidently quite ignorant taxonomically, though he had tutored under Prof. Erwin Stresemann in Germany), are systematic disasters, I now see quite clearly. The OLD FAUNA (1889-1898) of Oates and Blanford, based on the extensive field observations of the real giants of Indian Ornithology—Sykes, Tickell, Hodgson, Jerdon, Blyth and Hume—perhaps contained better species concepts and limits (1627 species treated), and more natural genera, than most of what has been published hence. Hume wrote in his MY SCRAP BOOK: OR ROUGH NOTES ON INDIAN OOLOGY AND ORNITHOLOGY (1869) that Thomas Jerdon and Edward Blyth together had "done more for Indian Ornithology than all other modern observers put together", and, that he considered himself "their friend and pupil". The entry of the subspecies ('race') category in biological nomenclature created doubt and confusion about what populations were good species and which were not. Through the lengthy quotation above, I have tried to pinpoint the problem and the exact biological definition of a species. Like Edward Dickinson and Pamela Rasmussen have now indicated support of my own uneasy discontent with current species identities, I believe there has been much over-lumping of many distinct, reproductively isolated species into what are many many quasi 'superspecies' in Baker through Ripley to the 'Grimskipps'. In the next Letter I will explain my point of view, by discussing the obvious errors of judgement, and fact, in a few Indian species and their so-called 'subspecies'. It is a startling discovery to find, really, that Sálim Ali (who was only the first good native, and not the "greatest", Indian ornithologist) was evidently not always certain of his bird species' identities, and therefore of their true biologies! Humayun Abdulali 'crossed swords' several times in print with his apparently more charming and socially appealing elder cousin Sálim, about the latter's blunders or inconsistencies with truth, but Abdulali's work has been sadly overlooked, underrated, and misunderstood.

The meticulous holistic research on our sub-continent's birds by Hugh Whistler (assisted by Norman Kinnear) and by Claud Ticehurst, based on badly needed fresh field collections made by themselves, La Personne and Sálim Ali, etc., unfortunately remained 'in manuscript' because of their untimely deaths, something like the sorry fate of Hume's voluminous notes for his projected "BIRDS OF THE BRITISH INDIAN EMPIRE", which were shamefully stolen by his native servant and sold as waste paper, in the Simla bazaar, in 1883! Sálim Ali and Ripley had access to Whistler's MS (now in the Natural History Museum in Tring, England), but the latter's SYNOPSES (1961, 1982) do not exhibit a clear understanding of real species identities and limits (in variation and distribution, or biology) and are clearly victims of a 'racial bias'! Even under the shadow of the 'subspecies slant', Humayun Abdulali, and the late Biswamoy Biswas (of the Zoological Survey of India), showed their superior comprehension of our avifauna's taxonomy, and I am now benefiting from their experiences, and scholarship, available in print.

Good taxonomists, of much field and museum experience, tend to develop an 'instinct' (like I had heard the noted coleopterist, George Ball, opine in an entomologists' meeting in Canada, two decades ago) which proves to be uncanny in recognizing true species that not only are reproductively isolated from related species populations in nature, but also occupy 'biogeographically correct' ranges and distributions, and exhibit isolating mechanisms, or distinct morphological characters, that are unique to their special, individual, taxonomic groupings, and also perhaps to their evolutionary status in time.

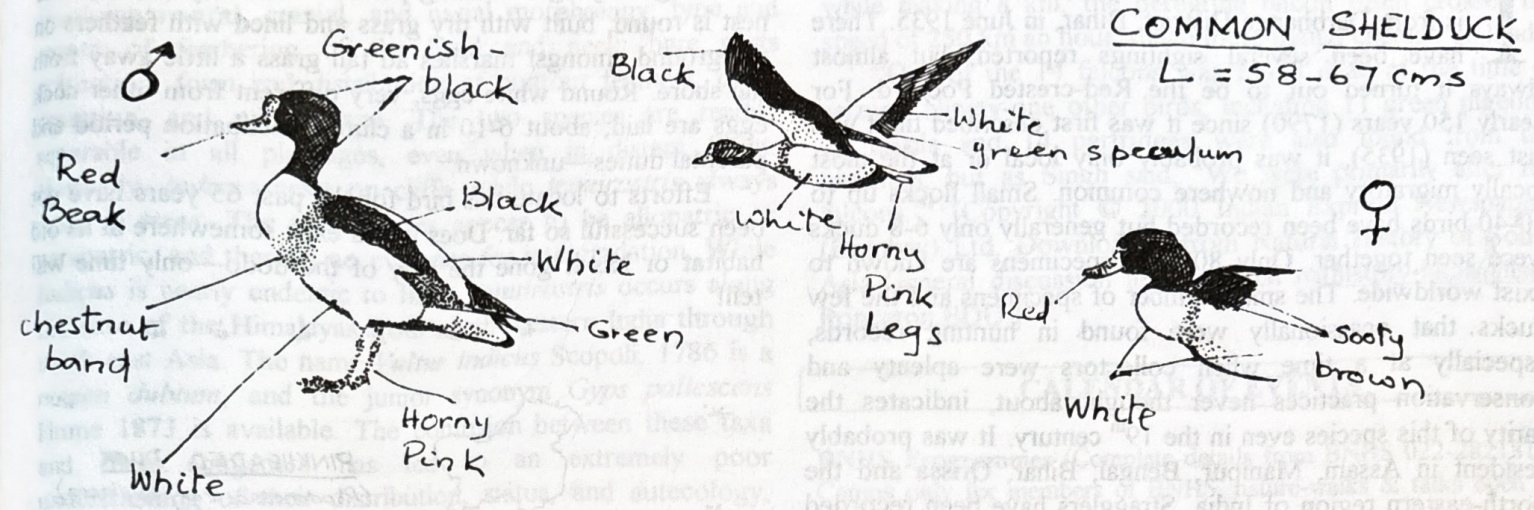
Allan Octavian Hume had felt there were at least 1600+ good "British Indian Empire" bird species, when he had catalogued them in 1879 (*Stray Feathers*, 8: 73-150, 185-190). Stuart Baker included only 1416 species in about 600 genera, but Ripley treated just 1240+ species (176 endemic) in 400 genera (but minus Burma). Grimmett *et al.* have initiated the restoration of species status to several so-called "subspecies" of Baker and of Ripley, and they treated some "1300 or so" species (correctly 1302+9; 141 endemic) in 433+1 genera, but they also continued to omit Burmese ones which Stuart Baker was the last to include. In my UPDATED CHECKLIST (1998) I recognized 1382 species (minus Burma; placed in 435 genera, with as many as 286 endemic species), but my more detailed analysis currently under way suggests that Hume's number is perhaps most correct, though now to be supplemented with several more species (under more 'natural' genera needing resuscitation), described, recorded or re-recognized since, from this sub-continent. When bird watchers are being told today that there are some 300-400 less species here than those that possibly truly occur, and also that there are only half of the endemic species that actually exist, perhaps readers ('birdys') may now begin to realize these grave follies, and inaccuracies, in current amateur authors' works on our bird diversity, and in the preciseness of their databases. Do we really know our bird species and their individual biologies, after more than two centuries of observation, illustration and documentation? I doubt it.

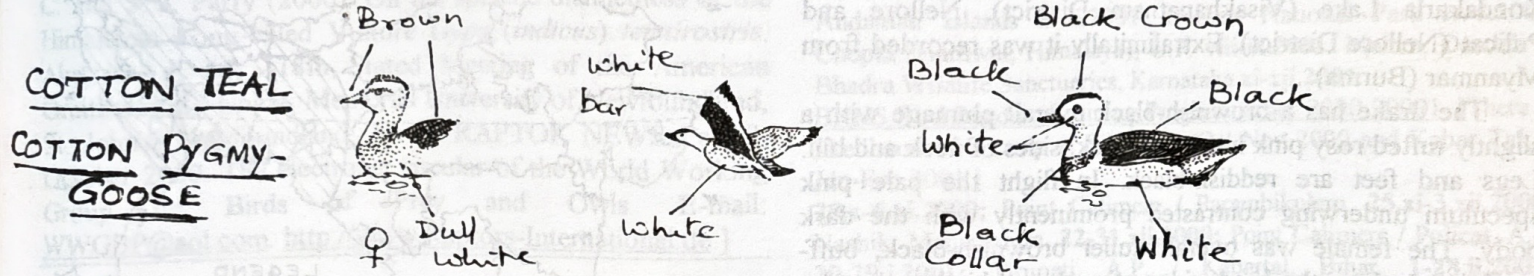
[**Errata:** Letter 37, *Pitta* # 113—Page 3, quotation para 1, line 5 should read "provided"; para 4, line 5 should read "figures"; and the Errata on page 4 should read "not 'déclassé' ".]

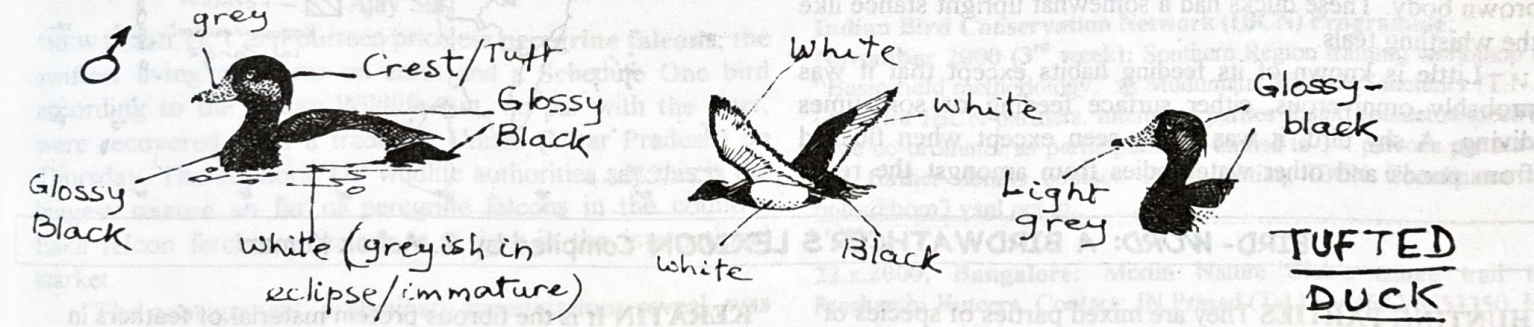
—Dr Kumar Ghorpadé, 1861 Bethel Street, Bangalore 560 043, India & varanus.kg@lycos.com

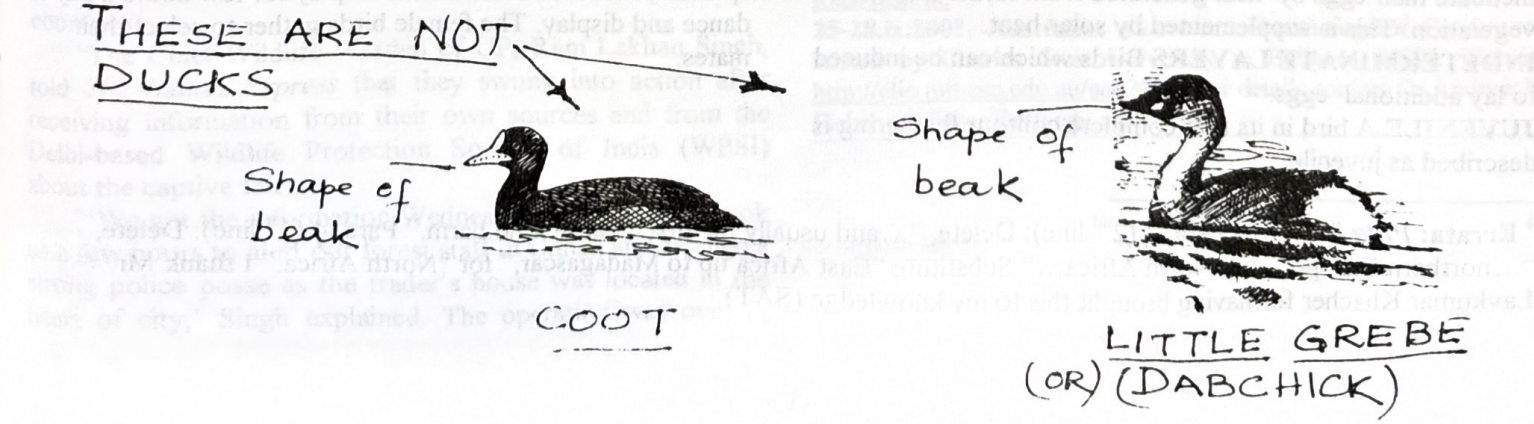
FIELD CRAFT *By* Siraj A. Taher & Sachin Jaltare

GEESE & DUCKS (Family: Anatidae): This is a very diverse and large group of waterbirds of varying sizes and colours, having flat beaks, webbed feet and short tails. These birds are mostly seen in large flocks or small parties. The regularity of their appearance between October and March every year throughout India on all types of inland water-bodies is a spectacular example of bird migration. Most species coming to A.P. are migratory, barring four.









SPOTLIGHT: Pink-headed Duck *Rhodonessa caryophyllacea* By Siraj A. Taher

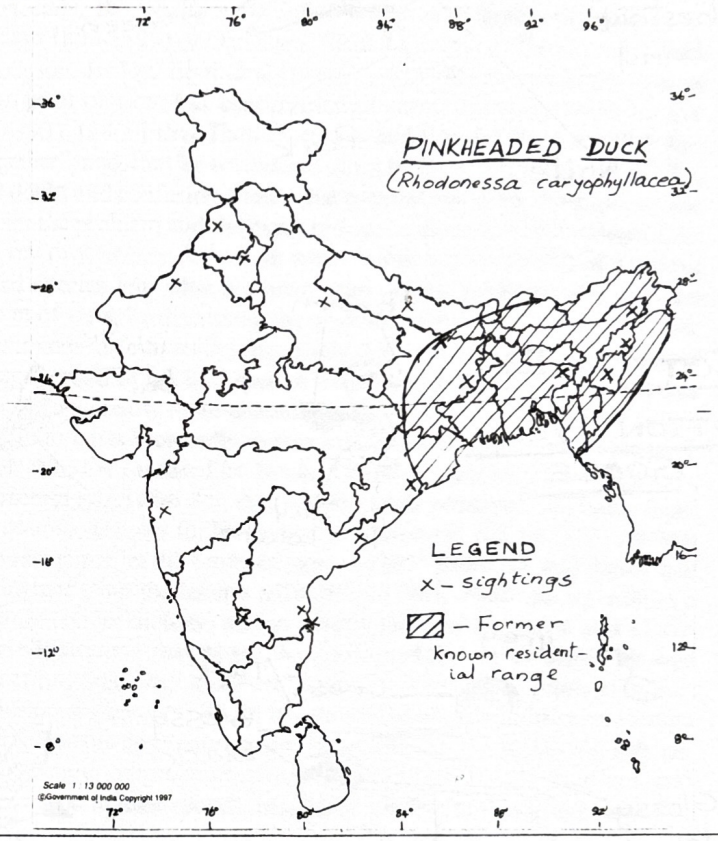
This column focuses on birds that are in the Red Data Book of BirdLife International as threatened / highly threatened species. Readers are requested to send information about these birds to the Society.[4]

The Pink-headed Duck is probably extinct. Last record is from Darbhanga District, Bihar, in June 1935. There have been several sightings reported, but almost always it turned out to be the Red-crested Pochard. For nearly 150 years (1790) since it was first described till it was last seen (1935), it was probably only local or at the most locally migratory and nowhere common. Small flocks up to 30-40 birds have been recorded but generally only 6-8 ducks were seen together. Only 80 skins/specimens are known to exist worldwide. The small number of specimens and the few ducks that ocassionally were found in hunting records, especially at a time when collectors were aplenty and conservation practices never thought about, indicates the rarity of this species even in the 19th century. It was probably resident in Assam, Manipur, Bengal, Bihar, Orissa and the north-eastern region of India. Stragglers have been recorded in winter from Punjab, Delhi, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh. In Andhra Pradesh, it has been seen in Kondakarla Lake (Visakhapatnam District), Nellore and Pulicat (Nellore District). Extralimitally it was recorded from Myanmar (Burma).

The drake has a brownish-black overall plumage with a slightly tufted rosy pink head, hindneck, sides of neck and bill. Legs and feet are reddish-black. In flight the pale pink speculum underwing contrasted prominently with the dark body. The female was overall duller brownish-black, buff-brown speculum, the head, sides of neck and hind neck paler pink than the drake, as also the chin and throat mixing into the brown body. These ducks had a somewhat upright stance like the whistling teals.

Little is known of its feeding habits except that it was probably omnivorous, either surface feeding or sometimes diving. A shy bird, it was rarely seen except when flushed from ponds and other waterbodies from amongst the reeds and tall grass jungle. Nesting period—June-July (Bihar). The nest is round, built with dry grass and lined with feathers on the ground amongst marshes ad tall grass a little away from the shore. Round white eggs, very different from other duck eggs are laid, about 6-10 in a clutch. Incubation period and parental duties—unknown.

Efforts to locate this bird for the past 65 years have not been successful so far. Does it still exist somewhere in its old habitat or has it gone the way of the dodo—only time will tell!



BIRD-*WORD*: A BIRDWATHCER'S LEXICON Compiled by S. Ashok Kumar

HUNTING PARTIES They are mixed parties of species of birds foraging in the same cliché at various levels.

INCUBATION The process of causing eggs to hatch by the application of heat.

INCUBATION MOUNDS Mounds built by megapodes to incubate their eggs by heat generated from fermentation of vegetation. This is supplemented by solar heat.

INDETERMINATE LAYERS Birds which can be induced to lay additional eggs.

JUVENILE A bird in its first complete contour feathering is described as juvenile.

KERATIN It is the fibrous protein material of feathers in birds.

KLEPTOPARASITISM Robbing another species of its prey is described as kleptoparasitism.

LEK Slightly raised, bare, display area where males of certain species collect for a communal display for few hours a day to dance and display. The female birds gather to select their mates.

[4] **Errata:** *Pitta* #113 p. 6 Para. 3 (2nd line): Delete, "...and usually the first...cause it no harm." Para. 4 (1st line): Delete, "...northern Europe...and North Africa..." Substitute "East Africa up to Madagascar," for "North Africa." I thank Mr Lavkumar Khacher for having brought this to my knowledge (SAT).

...*continued from page 2.*

In most points of difference, *Gyps indicus* shares characters with other congeners, while those of *G. tenuirostris* are evidently autopomorphic. We have found over 50 consistent character-state differences between the species, most notably involving rostral, cranial, and narial morphology; type and extent of feathering of the head and neck; bare parts coloration; form and distribution of contour feathers; pedal scutation; and wing shape. The two species are readily separable in all plumages, even when in distant flight. Normally, *indicus* nests on cliffs, while *tenuirostris* always nests in trees. The two species appear to be allopatric or parapatric, and there is no evidence for intergradation. While *indicus* is nearly endemic to India, *tenuirostris* occurs along the base of the Himalayas from north-western India through south-east Asia. The name *Vultur indicus* Scopoli, 1786 is a *nomen dubium*, and the junior synonym *Gyps pallescens* Hume 1873 is available. The confusion between these taxa and their congeners has led to an extremely poor understanding of their distribution, status, and autecology, which is hampering conservation planning, made urgent by tremendous declines among Asian vultures." [Rasmussen, P. C. and S. J. Parry (2000): On the specific distinctness of the Himalayan Long-billed Vulture *Gyps* (*indicus*) *tenuirostris*. Abstract, p. 64, 118th Stated Meeting of the American Ornithologists' Union, Memorial University of Newfoundland, St. John's, Newfoundland. *From*: RAPTOR NEWS Part 2, October 2000. The electronic circular of the World Working Group on Birds of Prey and Owls. E-mail: WWGBP@aol.com. http://www.Raptors-International.de.]

UP wildlife men net 14 rare falcons

Ajay Suri

"NEW DELHI, OCT 20: Fourteen priceless **peregrine falcons**, the swiftest living creatures on earth and a Schedule One bird according to the Indian Wildlife Act, on par with the tiger, were recovered from a trader in Unnau (Uttar Pradesh) on Thursday. The euphoric UP wildlife authorities say this is the biggest seizure so far of peregrine falcons in the country. Each falcon fetches as much as a tiger in the international market.

"The consignment, preliminary investigations reveal, was meant for rich Gulf nations where falconry still has the dubious distinction of being the most popular sport—the peregrine falcon being the most sought-after bird of prey. If not rescued, they would have reached Dubai and from there would have been sent to Saudi Arabia and neighbouring countries.

"The Chief Wildlife Warden of UP, Ram Lakhan Singh, told *The Indian Express* that they swung into action after receiving information from their own sources and from the Delhi-based Wildlife Protection Society of India (WPSI) about the captive falcons.

"'We got the information Wednesday evening, but it took us a few hours to alert our forest staff in Unnau and arrange a strong police posse as the trader's house was located in the heart of city,' Singh explained. The operation was over in minutes, but the trader, Rashid, slipped through their fingers. Instead, the police apprehended his son Salim who was promptly remanded to 14 days judicial custody by a city court.

"Known for its famous 'downwind loop' high in the air while making a kill, the peregrine falcon often crosses the speed of 250 km an hour, much more than a cheetah on land.

"One of the 14 falcons was found dead at the time of seizure. Ninety-one other birds, including 11 green pigeons, 26 quails and 14 partridges were also found from the premises, but as Singh said, 'We were primarily after the falcons.'" [Copyright © 2000 Indian Express Newspapers (Bombay) Ltd. Downloaded from Natural History of South Asia-General discussion and research nathistory-india@lists.Princeton.EDU.]

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

BNHS Programmes (Complete details from BNHS 022-2821811. Camps only for members of BNHS, nature-walks & talks open to all):

Annual Nature Camps for 2000-2001:

Keoladeo & Ranthambhore National Parks, Rajasthan, **xi-xii.2000**. Andaman Islands **ii-iii.2001**. Corbett National Park **iv-v.2001**. Chopta (Garhwal, Himalaya), U.P. **viii-ix.2001**. Molem, Dandeli & Bhadra Wildlife Sanctuaries, Karnataka **xi-xii.2001**.

BNHS Bird Banding Training Programme for 2000-20001. [There is likelihood of a camp at Sikkim in Oct-Nov 2000 and Kabar Tal in Jan-Feb 2001.]

28.x-6.xi.2000: Point Calimere / Parambikulam. **25.xi-3.xii.2000:** Nashik, Maharashtra. **22-31.xii.2000:** Point Calimere / Pulicat, A.P. **20-29.i.2001:** Tirupati, A.P. / Kabartal, Bihar. **1-28.ii.2001:** Andaman & Nicobar Islands. **20-29.iii.2001:** Point Calimere.

Indian Bird Conservation Network (IBCN) Programme:
November 2000 (3rd week): Southern Region training workshop in "Basic field methodology," at Mudumalai Wildlife Sanctuary (T.N.). Open for IBCN partners. Interested parties should contact respective state co-ordinator as participation is limited to 3-4 persons per state. For further details contact: Farah Ishtiaq, IBCN Coordinator at bnhs@bom3.vsnl.net.in.

22.x.2000, Bangalore: Merlin Nature Club's nature trail to Prashanthi Kuteera. Contact: JN Prasad (Tel.) 6644682/6653350. E-mail: jnprasad@usa.net.

23-29.x.2000, Kandy, Sri Lanka: *PASOC 2000, Second Pan Asian Ornithological Congress*. Contact: PASSOC 2000 Secretariat, Field Ornithology Group of Sri Lanka, University of Colombo, Colombo 03, Sri Lanka. Tel: 94-075-342609. Fax: 94-075-337644. E-mail: fogsl@slt.lk.

25-28.ix.2001, Australia: *Australian Ornithological Conference*, hosted by Charles Sturt University in Bathurst, NSW. Website: http://clio.mit.csu.edu.au/aoc2001. For details contact Dr Andrew M. Fisher at afisher@csu.edu.au.

BIRDING NOTES Compiled by Aasheesh Pittie

This column publishes birding notes in brief telegraphic form, from **Andhra Pradesh, Goa, Haryana, Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra, Punjab, Rajasthan & Tamil Nadu** on interesting and significant sightings and behaviour like breeding, feeding, migration, nesting, *etc*. Notes on flowering and fruiting trees and their relationship with birds are also welcome. English names and classification follow, S.D. Ripley's *A Synopsis of the Birds of India and Pakistan* (1982, 2nd ed.) and scientific nomenclature, T. Inskipp, N. Lindsey & W. Duckworth's *An Annotated Checklist of the Birds of the Oriental Region* (1996). Unless specified, all observations are for 2000. Abbreviations, Contributors, Notes, Regional Referees, *etc*., are at the end. For selection of breeding criteria 'Probable. Possible, Confirmed', see *Pitta* # 82, February 1998, p. 4.

ANDHRA PRADESH

MEDAK DISTRICT

ICRISAT (SQ)

20.vi: PAINTED STORK 16; SPOONBILL 8; YELLOW-EYED BABBLER PRB N under const.
22.vi: BLUE-LEGGED BUSTARD QUAIL PRB, br., disp.
7.vii: STREAKED FANTAIL WARBLER CB N with chicks.
21.vii: STREAKED FANTAIL WARBLER CB N with chicks.
28.vii: YELLOW-EYED BABBLER CB N with 5 eggs.
3.viii: PLAIN WREN-WARBLER CB chicks seen.
6.viii: GREY HERON CB 3N with 2 chicks each.
7.viii: PLAIN WREN-WARBLER CB N 5 eggs.
12.viii: ASHY WREN-WARBLER CB N with 1 egg; WHITE-THROATED MUNIA CB N with 3 eggs.
16.viii: PLAIN WREN-WARBLER CB N with 4 eggs.
19.viii: DABCHICK CB 2N, 1 with 1 egg; PURPLE MOORHEN CB N (no eggs seen); COOT CB 3N, incubation & br., at one. Eggs not seen.
20.viii: WIRETAILED SWALLOW PRB empty N.
21.viii: PLAIN WREN-WARBLER CB N with 5 eggs.
27.viii: MARSH HARRIER; MONTAGU'S HARRIER
4.ix: ASHY WREN-WARBLER CB N with 3 eggs.
9.ix: STONECHAT first seen.
12.ix: GARGANEY TEAL 2.
13.ix: STONECHAT regularly seen.
16.ix: CURLEW 2.
17.ix: PLAIN WREN-WARBLER CB chicks seen.
22.ix: EUROPEAN ROLLER (regularly till 14.x)
27.ix: SPOTBILL CB with 5 ducklings; EUROPEAN ROLLER.
28.ix: EUROPEAN ROLLER; LITTLE BROWN DOVE PRB const., N
4.x: LITTLE STINT *c*. 12.

Manjira Barrage 24.ix

GREY WAGTAIL *c*.10

ABBREVIATIONS: Ab-abundant; ad-adult/s; br-breeding; C-common/ly; CB-confirmed breeding; const-construction/ing; *c*.-approxim-ately; disp-display/ing; F-female; flt-flight; fly-family; freq-frequent/ly; hrd-heard; id-identify/ied; imm-immature; inc-include/ing; Is-Island; juv-juvenile; LM-local migrant; M-male; mat-material; N-nest/ing/s; POB-possible breeding; PRB-probable breeding; plm-plumage; RF-Reserve Forest; Resp-respectively; Tlk-Taluk; vil-village; WL-wildlife; yng-young.

CONTRIBUTORS: Suhel Quader (SQ).

REGIONAL REFEREES: Andhra Pradesh: Aasheesh Pittie; Goa: Heinz Lainer; Haryana: Harkirat S. Sangha; Karnataka: J.N. Prasad; Kerala: P.O. Nameer; Maharashtra: Nitin Jamdar; Punjab: H.S. Sangha; Rajasthan: H.S. Sangha; Tamil Nadu: V. Santharam.

CONTACT CALLS

"The September 2000 *Pitta* just arrived. As always it is good receiving regional news. If *Pitta* was to go Telegu, this small pleasure would be lost though I wonder how many more of these Forest Department employees would be as pleasureable to be out with as those at Rollapadu?

"I am not sure Suhel's blister beetles will produce blisters unless the insects are rubbed and crushed onto the skin i.e., if these indeed are the same beetles we get here.

"Ghorpadé's 'Letters' are indeed impressive. Perhaps for most, one page and a half each month carefully read would go well towards improving a capacity to read and contemplate on serious matters which more and more of us should be able to do as birds and other animal and plant life are being severely effected. When I say "other animal" life I mean also human beings—how much of the Hyderabad flooding misery was on account of human disregard to the natural systems? Of course, *Pitta* cannot get involved in human problems though we are finding it more and more difficult to prevent blurring of issues. I am one of those who firmly believe in keeping natural areas so recognised as inviolate to human exploitation.

"There seems to be a serious mixup between the Large Whistling Teal and the Brahminy Duck when Siraj says, para., 3 of 'Spotlight,' "Not good eating...Tame and confiding in its breeding ground especially Tibet and Ladakh where the predominant Buddhist population cause it no harm." This mixup spills over into the next paragraph where "the extralimital distribution of this duck" includes northern Europe, Spain, Central Asia and North Africa! You need to have this corrected in the next *Pitta*.

"Keep the joy of birdwatching alive. More people alive about the beauty and adaptability of birds, easier will be the task of protecting them. P.S. Be careful to continue being very Andhra." **—Lavkumar Khacher, Gandhinagar, Gujarat.**

LITERARY WRENDITIONS

"I hope you love birds too. It is economical. It saves going to heaven."—*Emily Dickinson*

For Private Circulation Only

For information, write to: Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh, PO Box 45, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad 500034, India.
Editors: Aasheesh Pittie (3350683) & Siraj A Taher (6612608). **E-mail**: aasheesh@hd1.vsnl.net.in
Membership (Rs): Admission=20; Ordinary=100, Student=25 per annum; Life=1,000. *Outstation cheques not accepted.*

PITTA

Bulletin of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh No 115: November 2000

PROGRAMME

FIELD OUTING: 19.xi.2000: Palmakole Tank, Mahbubnagar District. Members are requested to reach the destination by 7.30am. Palmakole village is *c.* 30km from Hyderabad on the Bangalore highway (NH #7). This will be a half-day trip. For details of transport contact Aasheesh (3350683), Siraj (6612608), Shafaat Ulla (3353098).

MEETING: 20-xi-2000, 6 p.m.: Vidyaranya High School, Opp., Secretariat, Saifabad, Hyderabad.

NOTES & NEWS

New Bird Species for Andhra Pradesh

Suhel Quader spotted the first **European Roller (*Coracias garrulus* Linné)** for Andhra Pradesh in ICRISAT Campus, Patancheru, Medak District, on 22 September 2000—as readers would have noticed from the Birding Notes column in *Pitta* #114, October 2000. Several birds were seen subsequently in ICRISAT by other birdwatchers. The species has been reported earlier from the western parts of Karnataka (its southern limit in India), besides sporadic sightings in Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh. It is a breeding summer visitor to Jammu & Kashmir and is generally seen in NW India during migration.

Sálim Ali Bird Count

12 November is Dr Sálim Ali's birthday and is celebrated by his beloved Bombay Natural History Society through a national programme—the Sálim Ali Bird Count. BSAP has received forms for this Count which will be held on Sunday, 12 November 2000. Interested members may contact the Hon. Secretary for the forms.

Spotting scope for Society

Hashim Tyabji has donated a Bushnell Spacemaster 15-45x zoom eyepiece spotting scope to the Society. This is a fantastic gift to the Society and will enhance the charm of field trips a great deal. It has come at the right time too, just at the beginning of the migratory season. Thanks Hashim, from all of us!

THE FIELD MUSE: Migrant invasion

Suhel Quader[1]

October sees a large influx of migrant birds. They are everywhere, and are more visible than the residents I have been watching for the past four months. (Or is it that one takes less notice of what is familiar?) One day there is an abrupt invasion of tree pipits[2]. Little flocks of these birds fill the sky, and flutter down to perch on trees and bushes, where I can get a better look. A little distance away two Bluethroats hop about on the bare ground among some bushes. And, wading in a puddle close by, a couple of Blacktailed Godwits probe the mud with their long, sensitive bills, searching for worms and crustaceans. A party of Little Stints dashes hither and thither along the edge of the water. The stints scurry along on short thin legs, stopping every now and then to push their beaks into the mud. They take flight all of a sudden, twisting and weaving in wonderful coordination as they rocket away into the distance. Other waterbirds have arrived as well: one evening I find almost 500 shovellor ducks bobbing up and down in the waters of Icrisat Lake. They swim lazily away as I approach—like most of the wildlife in Icrisat, they are much tamer than outside the safety of its confines. The raptor population is augmented considerably with the arrival of the kestrels from their distant breeding grounds. It appears almost as though there is a kestrel perched on every signpost or low bush. On perches not usurped by these migrants, I often see a resident White-eyed Buzzard solemnly scanning the grassland for a potential snack.

Some idle questions occur to me: How does a given area support the increased numbers of birds in the winter (both migrants and the young of many residents contributing to the increase)? It's hard to imagine that there is more food in the winter than in the monsoon (except for bird-eating raptors). Do migrants and residents compete for food? Or do they eat different kinds of food, and thus occupy different feeding niches from one another?

There are some surprises hidden amongst the newcomers. On a day in mid-September I spot a roller on an electricity pole. I am about to turn away to look for more interesting sights, but something makes me take a second look. This bird seems different from the Indian Rollers that are abundant in Icrisat. It looks sleeker, and has a distinct blue cast to the throat and head. And its back seems an unusually bright rufous-brown... A look at my field guide, and a few more sightings over the next few days, and I'm convinced that Icrisat has added another new species to the Icrisat list: the European Roller, *Coracias garrulus*. This species is known to migrate into the peninsula from its breeding grounds in the north, and has been recorded in the winter from Maharashtra and Karnataka. But this sighting seems to be the first from Andhra Pradesh. I suspect that birdwatchers here have seen this species before, but have overlooked it, as I very nearly did.

[1] Suhel carries out his fieldwork on weaverbirds at the International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics, Patancheru, A.P.

[2] *Anthus hodgsoni*.

Of course, the regular residents of Icrisat have not disappeared. The heronry on the islands of Red Lake is humming with activity – the noise (and perfume) of the nesting cormorants and herons wafts across the water on a gentle breeze. There are interesting residents closer to the ground as well. One hot and humid afternoon, a cobra starts to cross the track in front of me. I grab my camera and hurry forward, but my advances are rejected outright. The snake pauses, and expands its hood, but then lowers its head again and glides into the bushes before the blundering human can get within the range of a decent photo. I have often been asked whether I shouldn't be more careful about snakes while in the field. But it seems to me that snakes are usually more cautious than I ever could be. In all the time I have spent walking through thick grass and shrubs in Icrisat, I have never stumbled across a snake. The only times I have seen snakes are while they were crossing a jeep track, or searching for a meal in a weaverbird nesting colony, or in the shallow margins of a lake or pond. And I have had only one relatively close encounter with a venomous snake during my field work here: I briefly took my eyes off a particularly large Russell's Viper to rummage in my backpack for a torch (daylight was fading rapidly), and in that time the snake had travelled the three metres from where I first saw it to where it was now, three feet from my left foot. I did manage to approach and photograph a snake from quite close on one occasion. It was a year ago, and the cobra on the dirt road was behaving very strangely indeed. It turned and writhed on the road, and weakly struck at its own body and at the ground. It looked as though it had been run over by a vehicle, and that its back was broken. It was clearly unable to achieve the muscular coordination to move in a straight line, so it went around in slow, jerky circles, and couldn't get off the track. It was quite helpless, and, with my camera as a shield, I easily approached to within two feet of the dying snake as it feebly bit at the dust.

And here is a question for you, the reader: Should I have taken a stout stick and put an end to the pain the cobra presumably felt? Or should I have left it where it was, and simply let events take their course? I think this is not a trivial question, but one that raises difficult issues in our ethical and philosophical approach to other living things. Please send your thoughts to <suhelq@ufl.edu>, or by regular mail to the BSAP office address.

"Joe Skorupa and I conducted such a study on the Savannah River Plant, a 200,000-acre National Environmental Research Park operated by the U.S. Department of Energy in South Carolina. We compared the feeding ecology of the red-cockaded woodpecker with that of the numerous other woodpecker species by measuring where, and how, the birds foraged. We wanted to determine which, if any, of the other woodpeckers inhabiting these woodlands might compete with the red-cockaded woodpecker for food, perhaps to the point of contributing to the red-cockaded's rarity. These forests were a mixture of mature pines and hardwood trees. The pines grew to a typical height for the soil conditions and then slowly increased in girth as they aged. The trees all looked the same: The lower half of each tree was tall and slender, without branches, while the upper half formed a (sic) ovoid crown of trunk and branches. Many studies of birds' feeding habits have spent a great deal of effort measuring the height of foraging birds above the ground. In addition to the extra time required, this measurement is subject to error. We reasoned that the birds responded to the actual structure of the tree and did not care how high above the ground they were. So we recorded where in the tree the birds were foraging, which we could determine quickly and without measurement error. A bird foraged either on the trunk below the crown (below the lowest branch), on the trunk within the crown (above the lowest branch), on a primary limb (one attached directly to the trunk), on a secondary limb (a smaller limb attached to a larger primary limb), or on the ground. We also noted whether the tree was a pine, a hardwood species, a vine, or a fallen log and whether the bird foraged on living wood or deadwood. We recorded the sex of each bird studied, since other workers had noted differences in foraging habits between males and females. Finally, we studied the birds during the summer, when food would most likely be abundant, and again during the winter, when food might be scarce." (McFarlane, Robert W. (1992): *A Stillness in the Pines. The Ecology of the Red-cockaded Woodpecker*. Pp. 114-115. W.W. Norton & Co. New York.)

"Some birds specialize in feeding on insect outbreaks. The evening grosbeak is a nomadic species that has a special affinity for spruce budworm outbreaks. Although many species of birds ate budworms during an outbreak in Washington State, the grosbeak was particularly voracious. During the summer, when budworm larvae and pupae were susceptible to predation, the grosbeak population (adults and young) reached 300 birds per square mile at one study location and 1,800 birds per square mile of forest at another. At the lower density, each grosbeak consumed more than 26,000 budworms during the 55-day period of availability. The grosbeaks ate nearly 8 million budworms per square mile, 43 percent of all bird predation. At the site with higher grosbeak density, each bird consumed more than 12,000 budworms, or 23 million budworms per square mile of forest and 70 percent of total bird predation. Each grosbeak was the functional equivalent of $6.80 and $1.80, respectively, of insecticide application. Over a one hundred year harvest cycle, the Douglas fir-ponderosa pine forest provides $518,000 of forest products, and its birds provide pest control equivalent to $118,000 in spraying costs, both expressed as net present value per square mile. Such savings should certainly draw the attention of budget-conscious forest managers. Historically, budworm outbreaks have appeared about every 28 years in this region. Without the assistance of birds, outbreaks might occur every 3 years." (McFarlane, Robert W. (1992): *A Stillness in the Pines. The Ecology of the Red-cockaded Woodpecker*. p. 192. W.W. Norton & Co. New York.)

Rollapadu Field Camp Report

Aasheesh Pittie and C. Tom Hash have prepared a 10-page report of the Society's field camp at Rollapadu Great Indian Bustard Sanctuary, Kurnool District, Andhra Pradesh, India, 13-15 August 2000. Please write to the Hon. Secretary for Xeroxed copies @ Rs.20/- each (inclusive of postage in India).

...*Continued on page 7*

LETTER FROM AN INSECT-HUNTING ORNITHOLOGIST—39

"This undeniably informative and beautifully illustrated book has pretensions to be more. It aspires to be iconoclastic and revolutionary—what the publisher calls a 'radical interpretation'. The straw man that the authors enthusiastically demolish, and repeatedly attribute to the ornithologist Ernst Mayr and the geneticist Theodosius Dobzhansky, is the idea that fossil hominids are arranged in an evolutionary order, each one evolving into the next until the penultimate one finally turns into us. It would follow from this view—if anybody held it in the extreme form energetically savaged by Ian Tattersall and Jeffrey H. Schwartz in *Extinct Humans*—that you need only to know how old a fossil is to classify it: if it's a million years old it must be *Homo erectus*. Their own view is that there have been more than 15 species of humans, many of which co-existed with one another, and all of which are now extinct except *Homo sapiens*.

The longing to be revolutionary is something of an occupational disease among paleontologists [and several other quotidian scientists, obsessed with 'fame', not truth—K.G.]."

"What else could one mutter (if we must use such a loaded word) in reaching a judgement of this kind? What else are Tattersall, a curator at the American Museum of Natural History, and Schwartz, an anthropologist at the University of Pittsburgh, doing..."

"Whether they belonged to 15 species or one, individual males mated with individual females and had individual children. Some local populations were far from other populations, perhaps separated by rivers or mountains, or even just by cultural barriers, and so did not interbreed... There was a continuum of variation among local populations scattered around Africa, and later around the world. Names like 'race', 'subspecies', 'species', and 'genus' signify, in increasing degrees, the genetic separation that tends to arise when populations do not interbreed for a while.

With one exception, such names are arbitrary, in the same way as 'tall' or 'fat'."

"...It follows from evolution that if all the hominids who ever lived were available to us in a gigantic fossil museum, all attempts to segregate them into non-overlapping species or genera would be futile. No matter how richly branched the evolutionary tree, every fossil would be indirectly connected to every other by unbroken chains of potential inter-marriage. The only reason we can indulge our penchant for discontinuous names at all is that we are mercifully spared sight of the extinct intermediates. In the case of living animals, we see only the tips of the evolutionary twigs."

"The species is the one exception to the rule that all taxonomic names are subjective. Following Ernst Mayr himself, most biologists recognize an objective criterion for deciding whether two animals belong in the same species. Do they inter-breed? Not can they inter-breed in a zoo or with the help of artificial insemination, but **do they inter-breed under natural conditions?** [emphasis mine—K.G.]. Even in the case of surviving animals, it is not an easy criterion to apply. It is frequently infeasible for taxonomists to test interfertility, and they must judge whether the anatomical and physiological differences between two animals are such as we would normally expect to accompany inability to inter-breed. Where we are dealing with fossils, such subjective judgements are inevitable."

"They mount to no more than the traditional taxonomic disputes between 'lumpers' and 'splitters'. Lumpers say that what they call *Homo erectus* lived in both Africa and Asia. Splitters say the African specimens belong to a different species, *Homo ergaster*, if not (as the authors of this book suspect) more. Implicitly, splitters are committing themselves to the belief that Asian specimens would not have interbred with African specimens if given the opportunity, the lumpers to the opposite belief. It is a matter of judgement. Maybe the splitters' judgement is sounder than the lumpers', but judgement is all it is."

[Richard Dawkins reviewing, in the New York Times Book Review, "EXTINCT HUMANS" by Ian Tattersall & Jeffery H. Schwartz, Westview Press, New York, 256 pp.; reproduced in the *Deccan Herald* newspaper of 17th September 2000.]

Grimmett and the Inskipps did two things with their recent SUBCONTINENT GUIDE (1998) which nobody had attempted, and succeeded, before them. Undoubtedly, the quality of the 153 coloured plates, their careful workmanship and scrupulous accuracy, overwhelmingly dominates the user-value of this hefty tome. Not only are the paintings of all but a dozen or so known regional species well done, better than ever in sum-total, but a pleasing effort has also been made to display "sexual and racial variation...as well as immature plumages." On facing pages "captions identify the figures illustrated, very briefly summarise the species' range, seasonality and habitats, and provide information on the most important identification characters." Of the twelve artists (including our own Carl D'Silva, with his finest 'brushstrokes') my own selection of the very best plates are those by John Cox, of the pigeons, doves and sandgrouse, followed by the ones of thrushes, flycatchers and chats, by Alan Harris. There are some errors and inaccuracies, but this job is extremeley well done. The second maiden accomplishment of the producers of this book is the range maps given for all but 14 of the 1302 "species" treated in the main text. Though even here the data shown is not always precise, the painstakingly drawn maps certainly depict distributions better and more accurately than ever before. Even if a magnifying lens is necessary to use for many maps, it is well worth the extra effort, mind you.

In last month's letter I made some very significant statements. The Science of Taxonomy is dying, and even many of its few religiously obsessed disciples, and 'relict' savants, are currently pursuing "red-herrings" (*teste* C.J. Humphries, *pers. comm.*, November 1982), like DNA-DNA hybridization now, but also the fancy school of Cladistics which was taking fashion-crazy taxonomists by storm when I was pursuing my post-doctoral in the United States in 1982-1983. The "Grimskipps" say they have followed the ANNOTATED CHECKLIST (1996) of Tim Inskipp, Nigel Lindsey & William Duckworth for their "Taxonomy, sequence and nomenclature" and direct the serious, inquisitive, reader of their book to discussions of species limits in that work. Though 904 titles were cited by Inskipp et al. (1996) and the 'Grimskipps' mention that a "huge number of references were used during the writing of " their own tome (over 10,500 for India alone!), I can categorically propound that the taxonomic grasp and comprehension of these 'modern' authors disappoints me. Granted though that taxonomy is not their forte and that the five of them together have tried to compile the opinions and judgements of species limits available in scientific ornithological literature, and also have made a few decisions of their own. My own studied impression is that after Sykes, Tickell, Jerdon, Hodgson, Blyth, Hume, and then Whistler, the systematics of Indian birds has only received a 'step-motherly' and superficial treatment, even by Ripley and his contemporaries of recent decades. Sálim Ali hadn't a clue about taxonomy and very conveniently let Whistler, Abdulali, Biswas and Ripley tackle the "collecting and classifying specimens...the essence of 'scientific ornithology'...for vicarious identification in the museum" (in his personal, subjective wording) and he himself spent most of his later years after the 1950s mainly writing guide books, popularizing bird watching and promoting conservation. There has been a dramatic drop in bird surveys of our sub-continent (even by the Zoological Survey of India!) and sampling of important taxonomic (and biological) material, so that this 'moratorium' placed after our independence, and the virtual 'ban' on collecting, shortsightedly imposed by the conservationist lobby now, has brought Systematic Ornithology in our region to a halt!

How can judgements of species limits be made to understand how many distinct species (and endemics) exist in this sub-continent, or visit it (vagrants are 'accidents' and of little o no importance, except to the incorrigible 'twitcher'), when the databases (specimens, literature, unpublished observations) have literally 'dried-up', huge gaps still remain, and not all "the tips of the evolutionary twigs" are before us? The current conservation ethic and the paranoia of its 'activists' today have smothered scientific thought and expression. Experts are being ignored and ill-trained 'paramedics', or just local 'witch-doctors', are playing the role of surgeons in Nature's 'hospital'.

What would Dr Thomas Caverhill Jerdon, a trained surgeon in the Madras Army of the East India Company's establishment, have said were he alive today and had to 'debate' the identities or biologies of the several new bird species he had discovered (and/or described) with amateur British bird watchers then, who were usually only out for 'sport' in the jungle to break the tedium of their official duties? The 'revolutionary' iconoclasm of Sibley, Monroe & Ahlquist, which is unfortunately tearing to shreds centuries of painstaking scholarly research on the comparative morphology, anatomy, biology, ecology, biogeography and evolution of the world's surviving bird species, is also sounding the death-knell of objective scientific endeavour. My years of '*tapasya*' and '*riyaz*' in the field, lab and library on our birds (and insects) tells me that the sprinkling of real taxonomists alive and active on bird systematics today do not know even half of what the old-timers like Jerdon, Hodgson, Blyth, Hume, Whistler and their ilk knew and understood then. The 'Grimskipps', and before them authors like Henry, Sálim Ali and Ripley, gave us books which purported to be authoritative guides to the identities of our bird species, but what if more than one species are being packaged by them as a single, variable, 'species', with several so-called 'races'? Let me try and explain how even this superbly illustrated SUBCONTINENT GUIDE misrepresents real species and distorts facts about them. For the vast majority of you birders (birdys) who instinctively flinch at consulting journals which carry voluminous original data, and prefer to take your chances with these colourfully re-packaged illustrated guide-books that are hitting the market now, let me warn you, that besides those of unvariable and monotypic species, several of your field IDs are liable to be wrong! When your 'diagnosis' is wrought with potential error because of insufficient databases, what value is your observation, 'medical' opinion and the remedies (conservation plans and strategies) you are going to suggest or follow, based on insufficient and erroneous data?

Richard Dawkins (a distinguished biologist, but perhaps not really a taxonomist of any expertise?) may nonchalantly dismiss judgements about fossil taxa (especially of the recent genus *Homo*) as being "traditional taxonomic disputes between 'lumpers' and 'splitters'." But what would he say if I pointed out that making bad judgements about living taxa is a more serious matter and needs to be approached with maturity and wisdom? Like the Asian *Homo erectus* and the disputed 'solely African' *H. ergaster*, I can mention four such judgemental problems I see in other large mammals today. Bennett's Gazelle or our 'Chinkara' (*Gazella bennetti* Sykes) is, I think, not the same as the Arabian Gazelle (*Gazella gazella* Pallas), but a distinct, endemic, species of ours, as Colonel W.H. Sykes of the Bombay Army had decided, when he named and described it in the early 19th Century. Similarly, I believe our Asiatic Lion (*Felis persica* Meyer) has been reproductively isolated for too long a time now from the African Lion (*Felis leo* Linnaeus) to justify being clubbed with the latter as only a minor 'race'. More taxonomic research on our sadly extinct Cheetah (*Acinonyx venaticus* Griffith) may prove that this is also distinct from the living Cheetah (*Acinonyx jubatus* Schreber) still roaming the African continent. Finally, it is very probable that the smaller Forest Elephant (*Loxodonta cyclotis*) inhabiting tropical woodland in the Congo basin and the Guinea highlands, with rounded ears and more slender tusks, is distinct from the better known Bush Elephant (*Loxodonta africana*) of the great African savannahs, and the heaviest of all land animals.

Leaving the substance of my proposed fundamental 'shake-up' of our bird taxonomy and judgements made hitherto by ornithologists from Stuart Baker to the 'Grimskipps' for the final Letter of this year next month, let me close this essay with a few examples of good species that are still being erroneously coupled with closely related sister-species and projected together as being one and the same. Besides the case of the *Gyps indicus / tenuirostris* vultures published by Rasmussen and Parry recently (see Pitta 114: 2, 7), which fact/judgement was communicated by me also to Rasmussen last year, Baker's Kestrel (*Falco objurgatus* Baker), which is resident and restricted mainly to the Western Ghats and the Ceylon highlands is, according to my taxonomic 'instinct', a distinct population of reproductively isolated individuals, from the Eurasian Kestrel (*F. tinnunculus* Linnaeus) which is a Palaearctic species that also breeds on the Western Himalaya. The East Himalayan 'race' (*F. t. interstinctus* McClelland), recognized by Sálim Ali & Ripley in their INDIAN HANDBOOK, may or may not be also distinct. The 'Grimskipps' chose not to mention racial variation in this falcon 'species' (pp. 546-547) and omitted to show this on the plate (# 72). Their map on page 547 also omits showing its wintering range in the Andaman Islands, somewhat inexplicably. Considering that Howard & Moore (1984) in their WORLD CHECKLIST recognized eleven subspecies/races of *Falco tinnunculus* in Europe, Africa, Asia and their nearby islands, I suspect this so-called "species" is an excellent example of a wrongly diagnosed, clearly noticeable, plain-as-day 'superspecies'. Several other figures of 'racial variation' depicted in the SUBCONTINENT GUIDE's plates are pointers to poor species-limit judgements: Plate 88 (Golden-fronted Leafbird, *Chloropsis aurifrons*; the map is inaccurate), Plate 89 (Long-tailed Shrike, *Lanius schach*), Plate 97 (Orange-headed Thrush, *Zoothera citrina*), Plate 98 (Eurasian Blackbird, *Turdus merula*), Plate 105 (White-rumped Shama, *Copsychus malabaricus*), Plate 110 (Chestnut-tailed Starling, *Sturnus malabaricus*), Plate 117 (Black-crested Bulbul, *Pycnonotus melanicterus*), and Plate 140 (Crimson Sunbird, *Aethopyga siparaja*), among many many others. The English names given above are as in the 'Grimskipps' book and will doubtless be very unfamiliar to most Indian bird watchers. This name-change iconoclastic attitude of these authors I have protested against in my earlier writings and is another unfortunate facet of the rapid 'amateurization' of Science and 'scientific' thought, not method.

—Dr Kumar Ghorpadé, 1861 Bethel Street, Bangalore 560 043, India & varanus.kg@lycos.com

Honorary Secreary's Report presented at The Annual General Meeting of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh, Held on 16-11-2000—for the year ended 31-3-2000

Ladies and Gentlemen: Good Evening!

It gives me great pleasure to present you with a report of the happenings in our Society for the year ended 31st March 2000.

The Society's total membership stood at 284. The break up is as follows: Life Members 135 (14 new during the year), Ordinary 115 (76 new), Student 33 (25 new), Corporate 1.

During the year members made field trips to the following 11 sites: Anantgiri Hills (twice), Nehru Zoological Park, Mahavir Harin Vanasthali, Kasu Brahmananda Reddy National Park, Shamirpet Lake, Narsapur Reserve Forest, Umamaheshwaram, Ibrahimpatnam Tank, Bibinagar Tank, ICRISAT Asia Centre, Manjira Barrage.

The following programmes were held at the indoor meetings of the Society:

1. Screening of award-winning film on the rocks of Hyderabad.
2. Slide show on Kanha National Park by Aasheesh Pittie.
3. Talk on Gundla Brahmeshwaram Wildlife Sanctuary by Rajeev Mathew.
4. Talk by Y. Malini on medicinal plants.
5. Talk by S. Ashok Kumar on his tour of 4 wildlife sanctuaries in Gujarat.
6. Talk and slide show by Aasheesh Pittie on bird-banding in Tirupati region.
7. Talk on bird associations by S. Ashok Kumar.
8. Film show.

During the year:

1. The Society cooperated with the Indian Council for Cultural Relations in publicising an exhibition entitled "Birds in relief," by Sohel, at the ICCR gallery in May 1999.
2. The Society's monthly bulletin, *Pitta*, saw its 100th issue (August 1999) and an increase in size from 6 to 8 pages, with more columns and information on the art of birdwatching and the world of birds. 11 issues were published, one being a combined issue for Jan-Feb 2000.
3. A Wildlife Art Show—WASH2000 was organized by the Society in January 2000 in cooperation with ICCR, Hyderabad. The show curated by Atiya Amjad showcased the art of 27 artists. Without Atiya Amjad's help it would not have achieved the popularity that it did. The show was a resounding success and was visited by a large cross-section of people including school children. We would like to especially thank Leslie Jacob of ICCR and Amita Talwar of *Channel 6* for their encouragement.

During the year the Society benefitted from the generosity of the following persons. MK Kashinath donated an excellent video film on the Jurong Bird Park in Singapore. Mary Peacock gifted a copy of Sálim Ali's *Book of Indian Birds*. S Subramanya sent a large collection of his line drawings. Ambareesh Pittie donated stickers with BSAP's message and name on them. Roy Sebastian and Ramudu (both members) donated slides on Manjira Wildlife Sanctuary. Bishwarup Raha sent a wonderful set of slides on grassland birds.

At the turn of the century, it was decided by the Executive Committee to honour amateur ornithologists and non-governmental institutions who have contributed substantially to the ornithology of the Indian region. It was decided to present these awards to Mr Humayun Abdulali, Mr Zafar Futehally, Mr Lavkumar Khacher and the Bombay Natural History Society.

On behalf of the Society and on my personal behalf I would like to especially thank the following for their help and encouragement in more ways than one.

1. Sachin Jaltare for his talented artwork.
2. Kumar Ghorpadé for continuing to send his informative 'Letters' to *Pitta*.
3. The principal, management and staff of Vidyaranya High School for providing space for our indoor meetings.
4. The Chief Wildlife Warden, A.P. Forest Department and his team for their cooperation and forthright help whenever we required it.

The Executive Committee would also like to thank all members for their support and participation in the activities of the Society. Thank You.

BIRDWATCHERS' SOCIETY OF ANDHRA PRADESH
P.O. BOX 45, BANJARA HILLS POST OFFICE, HYDERABAD 500034

BALANCE SHEET AS AT 31-3-2000

LIABILITIES		Amount Rs.	ASSETS		Amount Rs.
Capital Fund:		1,14,531.50	Cash at Bank:		32,287.50
Opening Balance	1,01,281.50		HDFC Bank	32,287.50	
Life Membership	13,250.00		Fixed Assets:		7.00
Reserves	Nil		Binoculars (4)	4.00	
			Slide Projector (1)	1.00	
			Telescope (1)	1.00	
			Tripod (1)	1.00	
			Cash on hand		2,087.45
			Fixed Deposit – HDFC		70,000.00
			Closing Stock (Brochures)		1,716.00
			Excess of expenditure over income:		8,433.55
			Income & Expenditure 1998-1999	16,699.39	
			Excess of Income over Expenditure	4,860.59	
		1,14,531.50			1,14,531.50

NOTES TO THE ACCOUNTS

1. The Society is accounting its Income & Expenditure on cash basis.
2. Life Membership of Rs. 13,250.00, received during theyear, has been transferred to Capital Fund, as per the Society's Memorandum.
3. Fixed Assets received as donations by Society have been assigned nominal value of Re. 1.00 each taken into account.
4. An expense of Rs. 5,250.00 for printing of new brochures of the Society is being written off over a period of three years from 1998-99 to 2000-2001. The balance amount of Rs. 1,716.00 is being shown as closing stock of brochures.

INCOME AND EXPENDITURE ACCOUNT FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31-3-2000

EXPENDITURE		Amount Rs.	INCOME		Amount Rs.
Printing & Stationery:		17,269.50	Subscriptions:		13,160.00
Stationery, *etc.*	4,907.50		Corporate	1,260.00	
Brochures	1,716.00		Ordinary	11,100.00	
Printing – Pitta	10,646.00		Student	800.00	
			Other Income:		33,082.09
Bank Charges		253.00	Admission Fees	2,080.00	
Postage Charges		9.960.00	Bank Interest	6,209.09	
Miscellaneous Expenses		6,140.00	Donations	20,935.00	
Books & Periodicals		370.00	Sales—CBH	60.00	
Conveyance		3,589.00	Sales—Others	710.00	
Stipend		2,000.00	Stickers	3,038.00	
Meeting Expenses		800.00	Mayura	50.00	
Legal Fees		1,000.00			
Excess of Income over Expenditure		4,860.59			
		46,242.09			46,242.09

Sd/-	Sd/-	Sd/-	Sd/-
Aasheesh Pittie	K. Bharadwaj	Siraj A. Taher	Sunil Kumar Jain
Honorary Secretary	Honorary Treasurer	President	Partner, Sunil & Sanjay Chartered Accountants

SPOTLIGHT: Ferruginous / White-eyed Pochard *Aythya nyroca* By Siraj A. Taher

This column focuses on birds that are in the Red Data Book of BirdLife International as threatened / highly threatened species. Readers are requested to send information about these birds to the Society.

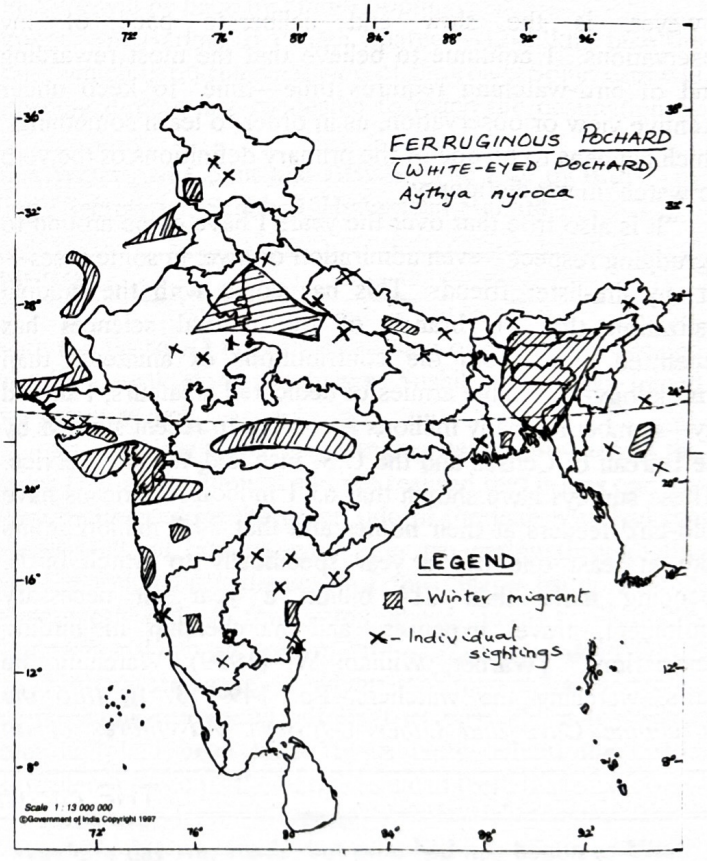
It is a small dark duck. The male has an overall dull chestnut plumage on the head, chest and breast, dark brown collar round lower neck and blackish-brown wings. Belly and under-tail coverts are white. Sides of body are reddish-brown getting darker towards the tail. The tail is black and the white eye in the male is conspicuous from short distances. The female is similar to the male but duller, the belly less white and the eyes are brown. In flight the reddish-brown small duck with a white belly, a white bar on the flight feathers (upper wing coverts or secondaries) are diagnostic features for identification of this duck. The wings are placed somewhat backwards on the body and the bird flies with fast wing beats. Young or immature birds are like the female—uniformly brown, with whitish-brown underparts and brown eyes.

The White-eyed Pochard's behavioiur is typical of the family (of Pochards), an expert swimmer and diver. It is neither shy nor difficult to approach. When alarmed, its initial flight is low and clumsy, but once airborne, it is a strong flier. If shot and only wounded, it can very rarely be retreived as it drops into the water and immediately dives. In coastal areas it rides the sea in open backwaters during the day and flies inland to feed in the marshy tanks and flooded paddy fields, going back to the sea at dawn. At other places, the White-eyed Pochard can be found on anytype of waterbody—tanks, marshy *jheels* and wetlands, either in the hills or plains. Though abundant and scattered amongst the vegetation cover, only 3-4 will rise at a time. It is by nature a bird of secluded marshy wetlands and weedy *jheels*. The bird is considered good sport for the gun but the flesh is poor eating.

Food consists of varied vegetable matter (shoots, leaves, seeds, corns) and also small marine animals like molluscs, crustaceans, water insects, worms, small frogs and fish.

Extralimitally it breeds in southern Europe, Poland, western Siberia, Mediterranean region, Turkey, Pamirs, Tibet and also in some places in North Africa. In India it is known to breed at high altitudes in Kashmir and Ladakh. The nest is built with dry rushes and grasses on the ground near the shore or amongst the marshes and reeds. It is lined with soft grasses and feathers. Breeding season (in Kashmir) is from May-July. The duck usually lays 8-10 pale buff oval shaped eggs. Incubation duties are not known (probably female only), though it lasts for 20-27 days.

A winter visitor (October-March) to India, though widely distributed and abundant in Pakistan and western India. Less common in eastern India, Bengal, Assam, Manipur and Bangladesh, it is scarce in the Deccan and South India (Karnataka, Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh). No reports from Tamil Nadu or Sri Lanka, though there are two specimens from the erstwhile Madras State in the Madras Government Museum, Chennai. There are two old published records from Andhra Pradesh—one from Visakhapatnam District (1904) and the other from Nalgonda District (1935). Though reportedly abundant in numbers and a wide distribution in several parts of India, there have been very few records of the Ferruginous Pochard from Andhra Pradesh—either during the Asian Waterfowl Census or other field trips of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh. The largest count of 200 was in Rangareddi District (1995), and 250 in Warangal District (1994)—the smallest being of 2 each in Nellore District (1988) and East Godavari District (1996). It is reported by the Asian Wetland Bureau that internationally the population is declining.



NOTES & NEWS

...Continued from page 2.

"The Lesser Fishing Eagle once occurred throughout the lower Himalayas in India, but the population is currently reduced to a few pairs in and near Corbett National Park. There has been no reproduction in recent years. A grossly deformed eggshell was retrieved from an unproductive nest in 1991. Because there was no portion of yolk associated with the shell, it was not possible to obtain any quantitative determinations of the content of organochlorine pesticides. But the "fingerprint" of DDT compounds, which resembled the composition of fresh DDT, indicates exposure to a recent application of DDT. Other organochlorines, including dieldrin, HCHs, chlordanes, and PCBs, were also detected. At the request of Bob Risebrough, Executive Director, The Bodega Bay Institute, we assisted with this project by providing matching financial support.

"Studies in India were carried out by Rishad Naoroji of Bombay (now called Mumbai), author of *A Handbook on the*

Birds of Prey of the Indian Subcontinent (under preparation), assisted by Leon Pereira, a graduate student at St. Xavier's college in Mumbai. Over the past several years an unhatched egg, egg fragments with membrances from a hatched egg, and egg fragments with attached membrances from an unhatched egg were obtained from a fourth nest. In addition, samples of the fish which are their principal food, the Golden Mahaseer and the Black Mahaseer, were obtained from the river flowing through the eagle territories, but upstream, outside the Corbett Park.

"Leon Pereira brought these samples to The Bodega Bay Institute laboratories, Berkeley, California, where he spent six months. The analyses were completed and final numbers of the concentrations of the contaminants will be determined shortly after a series of calibrations is carried out. Concentrations of the DDT compounds in the unhatched egg, however, were in the order of 900 ppm lipid weight, equivalent to those in the most highly contaminated eggs of Brown Pelicans in California in 1969, and about nine times higher than concentrations that would cause reproductive failure in Bald Eagles." [Walt Disney Company Foundation].

"One aspect of my **bird-watching** which has not changed, however, is the slow and deliberate pace of my observations...I continue to believe that the most rewarding kind of bird-watching requires time—time 'to keep under attentive view or observation, as in order to learn something,' which happens to be one of the primary definitions of the verb 'to watch' in my dictionary.

"It is also true that over the years I have come around to a grudging respect—even admiration or awe, in some cases—for my life-lister friends. This has come with the gradual realization that no branch of the natural sciences has benefitted more from the contributions of amateurs than ornithology—veritable armies of dedicated amateurs, I should say—numbering many millions according to recent surveys by the Bureau of Census and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. (These surveys have shown that 63.1 million Americans have wild-bird feeders at their homes and that 24.7 million adults take at least one trip a year specifically to watch birds, spending more than $14 billion a year on necessary equipment, travel expenses, and membership in birding associations." [Warner, William W. (1999): Watching the birds, watching the watchers. Pp. 149-173. In *Into the Porcupine Cave and Other Odysseys. Adventures of an Occasional Naturalist*. Pp. 247. National Geographic. Washington.]

Membership matters

- Members are requested to send their latest postal address, telephone and fax numbers and, e-mail address to the Hon. Secretary so that the Society's membership database can be updated.
- Ordinary Members can now compound their annual membership of Rs. 100/- for a period of 3 years and pay Rs. 300/- on renewal. This facility is not available for students.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

BNHS Programmes (Complete details from BNHS 022-2821811. Camps only for members of BNHS, nature-walks & talks open to all):

Nature Camps for 2000-2001:

Keoladeo & Ranthambhore National Parks, Rajasthan, **xi-xii.2000**. Khandala (nature trek), **1-3.xii.2000**. Pachmari and Satpura National Park, **4-8.xii.2000**. Andaman Islands **ii-iii.2001**. Corbett National Park **iv-v.2001**. Chopta (Garhwal, Himalaya), U.P. **viii-ix.2001**. Molem, Dandeli & Bhadra Wildlife Sanctuaries, Karnataka **xi-xii.2001**.

BNHS Bird Banding Training Programme for 2000-20001. [There is likelihood of a camp at Sikkim in Oct-Nov 2000 and Kabar Tal in Jan-Feb 2001.]

25.xi-3.xii.2000: Nashik, Maharashtra. **22-31.xii.2000:** Point Calimere / Pulicat, A.P. **20-29.i.2001:** Tirupati, A.P. / Kabartal, Bihar. **1-28.ii.2001:** Andaman & Nicobar Islands. **20-29.iii.2001:** Point Calimere.

Indian Bird Conservation Network (IBCN) Programme:

January 2001: Earlier slotted for November 2000 (now postponed). Southern Region training workshop in "Basic field methodology," at Mudumalai Wildlife Sanctuary (T.N.). Open for IBCN partners. Interested parties should contact respective state co-ordinator as participation is limited to 3-4 persons per state. For further details contact: Farah Ishtiaq, IBCN Coordinator at bnhs@bom3.vsnl.net.in.

25-28.ix.2001, Australia: *Australian Ornithological Conference*, hosted by Charles Sturt University in Bathurst, NSW. Website: http://clio.mit.csu.edu.au/aoc2001. For details contact Dr Andrew M. Fisher at afisher@csu.edu.au.

THE *cachinnans* CORNER

Two people are talking about their occupations...The first one says to the other, "What do you do?" The second one says, "I'm an orthinologist". The first one says, "You mean an ornithologist?" The second one says, "No, an rthinologist. I'm a word botcher, I botch words". [Birdchat]

For Private Circulation Only

For information, write to: Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh, PO Box 45, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad 500034, Ind.

Editors: Aasheesh Pittie (3350683) & Siraj A Taher (6612608). **E-mail**: aasheesh@hd1.vsnl.net.in

Membership (Rs): Admission=20; Ordinary=100, Student=25 per annum; Life=1,000. *Add Rs.25/- for outstation cheques.*

Indexed 13/2/01

12.XII 2000

PITTA

Bulletin of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh No. 116: December 2000

PROGRAMME

FIELD OUTING: Seats may be available in volunteering members' cars and will be reserved on a first-come-first-served basis. Members willing to take passengers may please contact the following: Shafaat Ulla (3353098), Aasheesh (3350683) or, Siraj (6612608).

Saturday, 16-xii-2000: Kompalli Kanchas, Medchal, Rangareddi District: Route: Nagpur road, NH #7. From Paradise Flyover (Secunderabad) proceed towards New Bowenpalli X Roads. Turn right towards Medchal and keep driving on NH #7 up to Dulapalli turn-off. Here you will see a large hoarding "Air Force Academy." Keep going for another ½km. You will see large sheds of Food Corporation of India (FCI) on the right and a metal road going in on the right. Turn onto this road. It leads to the kanchas (grasslands). Distance: Paradise—Kompalli Kanchas, 22km. Some cars will start from Shanbhag Hotel at Panjagutta at 3pm., and from La Palais Royale function hall (Bowenpalli road opp., Bison Polo Grounds) at 3.40pm. Members proceeding directly are requested to reach the FCI turn-off between 4pm-4.15pm. The highlight of the trip will be the migrant harriers coming in to roost on the grasslands. We will be back by 8pm-8.30pm.

24-xii-2000: Rourial Tank, Rangareddi District: Route: Charminar *via* Barkas to Pahadi Shareef—12-13km, take the first left turn after Pahadi Shareef and drive on for 5km for the tank which is on the right side of the road. Some cars will start from Shanbhag Hotel at Panjagutta at 7am. Members proceeding directly are requested to reach the destination by 7.30am. This will be a half-day trip.

INDOOR MEETING: 18-xii-2000, 6 p.m.: Discussion on Asian Waterfowl Count and BBC's "The Life of Birds," by David Attenborough, Part 2 (1 hour). Vidyaranya High School, Opp., Secretariat, Saifabad, Hyderabad 500004.

NOTES & NEWS

PALMAKUL REFLECTIONS: J.V.D. Moorty

The dirt track to the left, about 40kms on, off the Bangalore highway—the landmark given by Aasheesh—was difficult to spot and so taking the next track half a kilometre further ahead we ended up on the eastern side of the water body at Palmakul, something that turned to our advantage as we had the sun behind us.

Along with trucks that were being washed, their attenders were busy taking a dip themselves as well, something that didn't appear to disturb the Black-winged Stilts along the shore not far from these aquatic goings-on. Priya and Ravinder, the new comers, were introduced to the world of shorebirds on a positive note. The spotting scope showed a pair of Common Sandpipers chasing each other busily on a small reed covered island. A few Little Cormorants were drying their wings after their food dips, while a few others were just as busy trying to get their breakfast act together. Shefali spotted a Pied Kingfisher doing its act of hovering, spotting and diving for fish. She wanted to know how often the Kingfisher does manage to catch fish. The short shrill staccato call of a flock of Indian River Terns then caught our attention and Vinay and Sam promptly had their field glasses on them. Wiretailed Swallows showed us their skills along with their cousins the Common Swallows and the Redrumped Swallows. In the far distance we could see a cover of Coot swimming, but as we were too far to ID the other paddling of ducks, we decided to take a walk along the banks. Sushil and Devika joined our group as well.

A Grey Heron languidly winging its way low across the water held us spellbound and we realised that it was coming towards us because the other side of the lake now had the bigger walk of birders, who after navigating through the early morning "calisthenics" of the village badly wanted some fresh air! A few yards ahead, in a small ditch, Ravinder, a keen student of snakes, saw two dead Olive Keelback Watersnake *Atretium schistosum*, a perfectly harmless non-venomous variety. They were about 40-45cms long and had been killed by a blow behind the head. Ravinder showed us the harmless small teeth that this feeder of mosquito larvae, among other larger prey, has. Ravinder's day was made, but ours had just begun as Vinay now spotted a White-necked Stork wheeling its way up. A large gang of masked Blue-tailed Bee-eaters, the blue on the tail glistening brightly, greeted us. Their smaller kin, the Small Green Bee-eaters indulging in fancy aerobatics were busy catching insects. A Little Ringed Plover flashed *pee-ooing* past. A Large Pied Wagtail took cue and landed a safe distance away tail a-wagging. A Spotted Sandpiper offered a contrast in plumage to its much plainer relative. A Pond Heron, showing signs of breeding plumage, took to whitish wings.

We set up camp and Sam who had the scope promptly spotted a Darter sitting amongst a flock of Cormorant. Each one of us had a good long look at it. We now had a good look at the ducks on the water and were able to identify a host of Spotbills, some up-ending *i.e.*, with their bottoms up while feeding underwater. Common Pochards and Red-crested Pochards swimming together made it easy to have a small class in identification. Garganeys and Pintails and Shovellers, with their distinctive beaks, added to the variety and there was a lone Wigeon I saw amongst them, a fact borne out later by Sachin. Common Teal and Lesser Whistling Teal offered the mixed flock a study in contrast both in size as well as plumage. The far shore—birds are always on the far shore—had the Large and the Median Egrets as epitomes of patience. In the water surrounded by some rushes was a small flock of Brahminy Ducks keeping themselves aloof from the general milieu. After a long time we saw a Hoopoe. Sad, how we are down to feeling glad about seeing just one of a kind and feeling good about it. Perhaps in the future we would be ecstatic if we saw just half as many species as we do now. I am happy that Shefali is beginning to enjoy these jaunts along with me.

Hunger pangs meant that Sushil and I had to walk back to fetch breakfast. This turned out to be a blessing as we saw the third kingfisher, the Small Blue Kingfisher, land near a hole in the mud bank with a small fish in its beak. "Nesting?" Sushil wondered aloud but we couldn't make sure. In the bushes next to the factory wall two pairs of Purple-rumped Sunbirds twitted their way through the branches looking for flowers to sip from. A lone Redshank attracted Sushil's eye and he attempted a photo shoot. Our group headed on further towards the shelter of some trees bordering some fields about 200 yards inwards from the water where we had breakfast while watching a cricket match in progress. The fields were abounding with Paddyfield Pipits. I am sure I also saw the Tawny Pipit, but I am not sure of my ID of the Richard's Pipit. A female Marsh Harrier was scouring the field for feed. A male Ashy-crowned Finch Lark was rising and falling with its song. A flock of White-headed Babblers announced their presence in the bushes bordering the fields. House Swifts circled overhead and a small flock of Palm Swifts, with their slender aerodynamic bodies zipped about. A bird on a telegraph wire in the shadow of the bakelite insulators had us engaged for quite some time. Only when it turned could we make out that it was the Red-winged Bushlark. We could see that the Western group had disappeared back to the village and we decided to call it a day as well and walked back through the cricket match. A Pied Bush Chat marked its presence as it flew across our path. We made our way back to the parked cars and promptly saw the other group driving up for a reunion. After exchanging notes on the day's birding we headed for home, seen off by a pair of Jungle Crows.

Palmakul Tank has a circumference of about 4 to 5 kms and being tucked away from the busy highway offers the birds a good place to rest, roost and feed. There were small fish in the water, as was shown to us by the birds, and they didn't appear to be too disturbed by the people around. Palmakul was a maiden trip for my passengers and me. I wonder how many years water bodies like these around Hyderabad will last. We can only hope that sometime, and soon, sanity will prevail that will enable us to conserve, protect and enjoy these wetlands—a manna in the wilderness—for the well-being of everything depends thereon.

The Field Muse: Velavadar National Park

Suhel Quader[1]

Mid-November finds me in Velavadar National Park, Gujarat, a 36km^2 mosaic of grassland, *Prosopis* thickets, and barren, saline ground near Bhavnagar. Velavadar is best known for its large population of blackbuck[2], and is one of only two areas where blackbuck are known to lek. A lek is an aggregation of males, each of whom defends a small territory (sometimes a mere ten metres across) from other males. Females visit the lek for the sole purpose of mating—they mate after a prolonged courtship sequence with one male, while neighbouring males attempt to disrupt courtship and maneuver the female into their own territories. In Velavadar, the main lekking ground has persisted for many years, and is conveniently located adjacent to the Forest Rest House. At the peaks of rutting activity (in April-May and September-October), there can be up to 100 males holding territories on the lek, hopeful aspirants in an antelope-*swayamvara*. It must be an impressive sight: the confusion of males courting, fighting, displaying—horns waving in the air, black-and-white bodies flashing in the sunlight. There are, unfortunately, few females in oestrus when I visit, and the lek is nearly deserted, except in the evenings, when a few males drift in and head desultorily for their territories. They mark their property by defaecating in the same spot over and over again, creating the dung piles that form the core of their territories. Swarms of migrant swallows sometimes fill the air over the lek, perhaps feasting on the insects attracted to the concentration of dung.

Velavadar is also famous for hosting the largest roost of wintering harriers in India, possibly the largest in the world. In 1997, the population of roosting harriers was estimated at over 3,000[3]. This winter, however, there are fewer harriers than is usual. Only a few lonely individuals flap lazily over the tips of the grasses. The monsoon rains have been poor in Gujarat this year, and perhaps this has something to do with the low numbers of these birds. Harriers prey on small mammals and birds, but their principal food is insects in the grasshopper family, and we notice precious few of these as we walk through the grassland. Perhaps this also contributes to the scarcity of shrikes. One evening we watch a Rufous-tailed Shrike tackle a large grasshopper—almost half its size. The insect

[1] Suhel carries out his fieldwork on weaverbirds at the International Crops Research Institute for Semi-Arid Tropics, Patancheru, A.P.

[2] Kavita Isvaran, who has been studying blackbuck in Velavadar since 1994, provided much of the background information that I present here. The "we" refers later in the text to Kavita and me.

[3] Clark, R., *et al.* 1998. Forktail 14: 70-71.

manages to get away from the sharp claws and beak twice, before the shrike succeeds in pulling it out of the safety of the tall grass and on to bare ground. There, it carefully dismembers and swallows it.

A few other bird species are relatively abundant. There are more Rufous-tailed Finch-Larks than I have ever seen in a single location before. I see them along the jeep tracks, alone, in pairs, and even in large flocks. A few small waterbodies have Shovellor ducks and Spotted Redshanks. Small flocks of Brahminy Ducks make their loud, upwardly-inflected "*aa*?" call that sounds eerily like a puzzled human. Two Greater Flamingoes wade and swim gracefully through a pond before flying to another nearby.

Flocks of Demoiselle and Common Cranes wheel high above the Park. They are small flocks, not larger than 50 or 60. I learn that in October, however, a flock of 700 Common Cranes was seen in Velavadar. The two species are a little hard to distinguish in flight—the way to do so is to look at the black on the neck: In the Common Crane, the black is confined the upper portion of the neck, and the lower neck is white. The black neck-feathers of Demoiselles, on the other hand, extend much lower, into a long "beard" that is clearly visible against the pale upper breast. Sandgrouse are also difficult to identify in flight. Their rapid flight and the background of a bright sky conspire against the watching birder. On one occasion we are lucky enough to be able to examine a flock on the ground. Despite the distance and shimmering heat-waves, we are able to identify them as Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse, and after days of frustration and invective I am very happy. Another sight to gladden the heart—two Indian Griffons wheeling high above the village just outside the Park. The sighting of these vultures, and a report of a King Vulture from nearby is very welcome indeed, given the drastic decline in vulture populations across the country.

One cool morning, we climb a watchtower next to a waterhole—and see something completely unexpected. A male blackbuck lies in the shallows at the edge of the water, killed and partly eaten by wolves a few hours earlier. The wolves have gone by the time we arrive, but there is a jackal at the carcass, tearing out chunks of meat and bolting them down. It seems very nervous, running frequently to higher ground and scanning the surrounds with ears alert. Soon it leaves altogether, and trots off into the distance, its stomach bulging. For a while the blackbuck lies undisturbed. Then a family of wild boar appears. The first adult to detect the kill pauses, then runs down the incline to eat. It is soon joined by two more adults. The two piglets in the party join in a little later, and all five settle down to eat in earnest. About half and hour later, an unforgettable sight. A very large sounder of boar emerges, racing across the bare ground between the grass and the waterhole. It consists of are five adults and ten or twelve piglets of different sizes. The piglets' legs work furiously, pumping back and forth as they scurry along, trying to keep pace with the rest. The group pauses under a bush where the wolves had dragged the entrails of the blackbuck. Soon they are at the kill itself, and the outnumbered first group reluctantly retreats. Now there is real pandemonium, with 15 pigs jostling and pushing and squealing around the carcass, snouts covered in blood. Their teeth are not built for cutting meat, and each mouthful swallowed requires considerable effort. And then, suddenly, they are off again—even though only about half of the kill has been eaten. It is an amusing sight indeed; the pigs strung out in a line, tearing across the ground as if their lives depended on it, the little ones bringing up the rear as usual. The dead blackbuck remains, pushed into deeper water by the scuffles of the hungry pigs, waiting for the next breakfast guest that chances by.

In last month's "Field Muse", I asked for readers' opinions on whether I should have put a snake with a broken back out of the pain it presumably felt by killing it or whether I should have let events take their own course. Two replies have come in so far.

Dr. Aminuddin Khan says "If I consider the matter objectively, I can't help coming to the conclusion that whatever Suhel may have decided to do, it would have been the 'event' taking its own course! The question he asks only comes into being because he happened to be there. In other words, the meaning of any event is the meaning we give it. It has no intrinsic 'meaning' of its own."

Prashant Bhardwaj writes that it is not at all a simple issue. "I thought all about it and one day I could reason that you should have killed it ending its misery, because the very idea of life is to avoid pain but the very next moment I was thinking that you should not have precipitated in ending its life, because the pain he is suffering is his share (theory of Karma of Hindus) and as such my conscience does not allow me to kill. Maybe it's a situational question which does not call for a cut and dried answer extending to all situations."

Asian Waterfowl Count

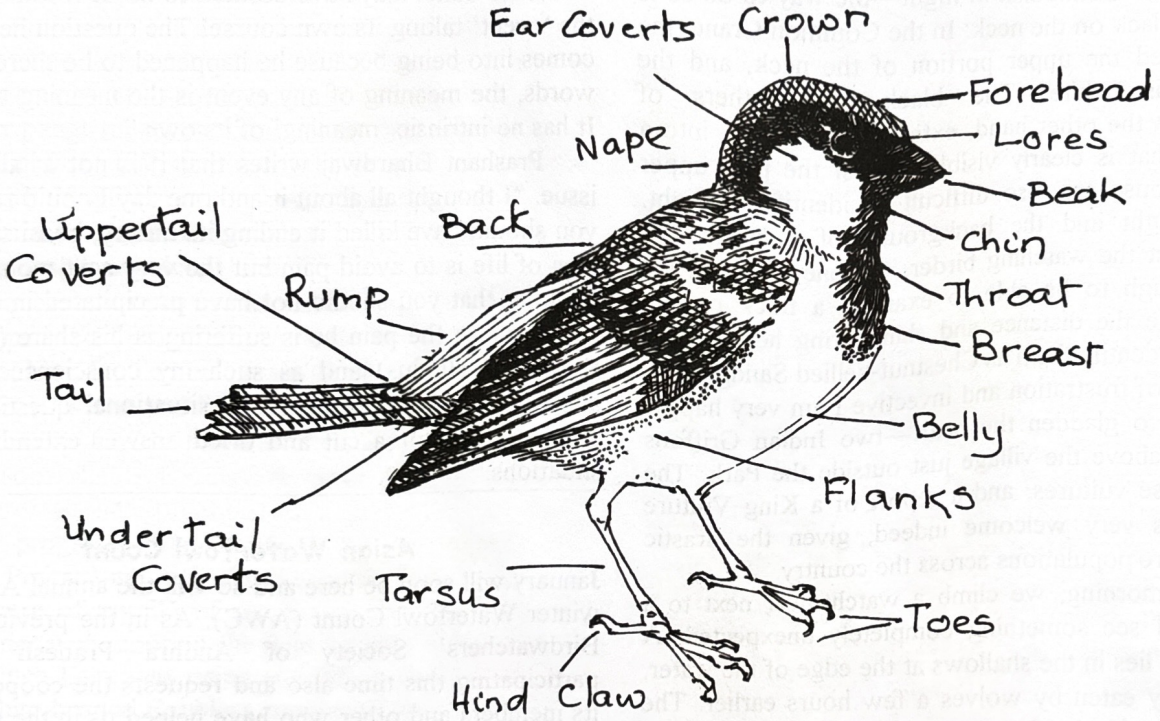
January will soon be here and so will the annual Asian Mid-winter Waterfowl Count (AWC). As in the previous years, Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh will be participating this time also and requests the cooperation of its members and other who have helped us in the past. You are requested to cover at least on wetland between 1-30 January 2001 (preferably 13-27 January) and in case you can do more, it will be very good. We are trying to concentrate on some of the major and important wetlands of the state and hope you will be able to help us in our efforts. Forms and instructions including a list of the important wetlands of Andhra Prdesh will be sent on request to all those who wish to participate in this programme. If it is convenient for you, try to cover at least one of these. Co-ordinate with other counters in your region to avoid duplication of work. If more forms are needed, please get them Xeroxed.

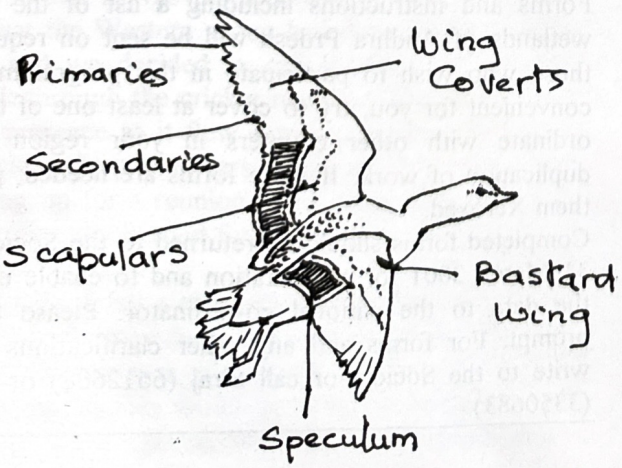
Completed forms should be returned to the Society before 31 March 2001 for computation and to enable us to send the data to the national co-ordinator. Please try to be prompt. For forms and any other clarifications you may write to the Society or call Siraj (6612608) or Aasheesh (3350683).

FIELD CRAFT *By* Siraj Taher & Sachin Jaltare

Plumage Terminology: The figures on this sheet illustrate the main and distinctive adult plumages and names of parts of the bird's body. This termiology for bird topography is used the world-over by scientists and amateurs alike. Juvenile plumage is different from that of adults and in many species is looser and fluffier than the subsequent plumage. This juvenile plumage may be retained for different preiods of time in different groups of birds. Also, in many species the breeding plumage of the males is more colourful compared to the female plumage.

PLUMAGE AND PARTS OF A BIRD





SPOTLIGHT: Comb Duck *Sarkidiornis melanotos* By Siraj A. Taher

This column focuses on birds that are in the Red Data Book of BirdLife International as threatened / highly threatened species. Readers are requested to send information about these birds to the Society.

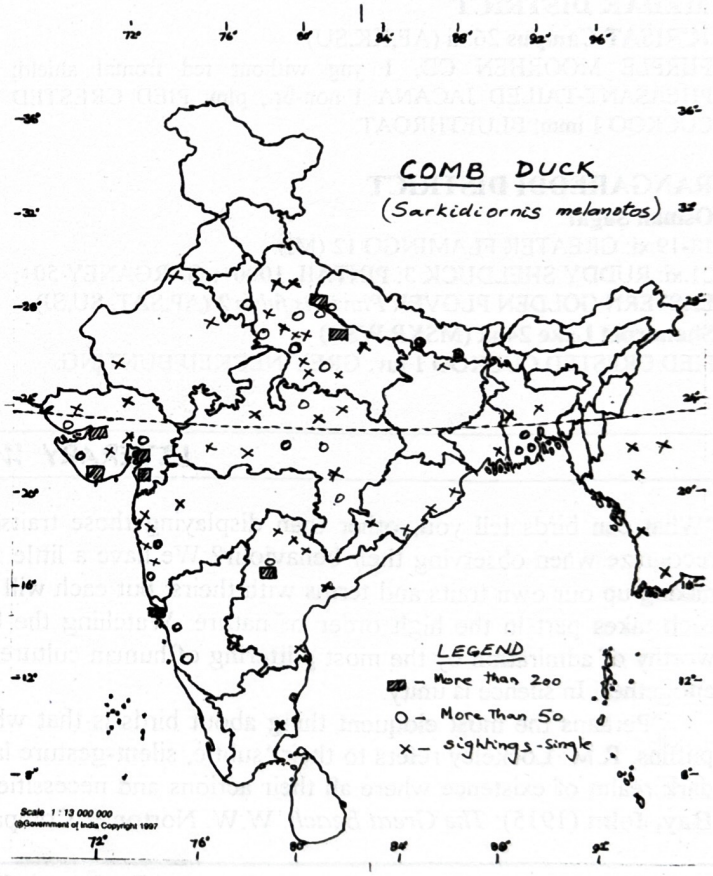
A large, perching duck, basically white, black and grey in colour. It has a whitish head speckled with glossy black, with the top of head and back of neck also black. Lower plumage white, washed with pale grey on sides of breast and flanks. The back is brownish-black glossed with blue-green. Incomplete narrow black breast band is also seen. There is a black fleshy knob (or comb) on the base of the bill, near the forehead for the male Comb Duck, hence the name. Female is smaller than the male and also is of duller plumage and does not have the 'comb'. It does not have the half-collar round the breast. The juvenile has a pale supercillium, buff sclaing on upperparts and rufous buff underparts with dark scaly patterns on sides of breast.

It is a resident duck but shifts locally with rains—occurs almost all over India, Nepal and Bangladesh. It is rare in the South and absent in Pakistan. The flight of the Comb Duck is powerful and fast. It has a 'goose-like' call and is very noisy at the approach of an intruder. It prefers marshy wetlands and jheels in the plains and tanks in well-wooded countryside. Seen in pairs, small parties and, sometimes in large flocks also. Its food consists of wild and cultivated grains, roots, seeds and shoots of water plants, worms and larvae of aquatic insects. It can walk well and gets its food mainly by grazing. It can also dive well when necessary.

Its breeding season is from June to September but mainly July-August in Andhra Pradesh. The nest is a rough structure of sticks lined with grass built in holes and hollows of large trees, preferably mango. A clutch consists of 8-12 oval-shaped white eggs but sometime there could be more. Incubation lasting 30 days is by the female alone.

Only one nominate race and one population is recognized. Partial migrant with the major population confined to India though small numbers can be seen in Nepal, Bangladesh, Myanmar (Burma) and Thailand. The entire population of the Comb Duck was estimated around 6,000 birds in 1994 by the Asian Wetland Bureau. There is every likelihood that several waterbodies were not counted during the Asian Waterfowl Census—so the numbers of Comb Ducks could be much higher than that recorded, but the fact remains that trends indicate declining numbers. While Gujarat accounts for the largest number of birds in India, Andhra Pradesh has recorded the largest single population at Singur Reservoir on Manjira River (Medak District). Uttar Pradesh, Goa, Maharashtra and Karnataka also have small numbers during winter. Tanks in ICRISAT Campus (Medak District) also have 100-150 birds wintering there for several years. Being a protected area, the Comb Duck population every year, shows some increase in numbers here. Other places in Andhra Pradesh where it has been recorded is Manjira, Inkriyal and Pakhal.

Extralimitally this duck has been recorded from Gambia, Sudan, Malagasy, Burma and south-east China



BIRDING NOTES Compiled by Aasheesh Pittie

This column publishes birding notes in brief telegraphic form, from **Andhra Pradesh, Goa, Haryana, Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra, Punjab, Rajasthan & Tamil Nadu** on interesting and significant sightings and behaviour like breeding, feeding, migration, nesting, *etc*. Notes on flowering and fruiting trees and their relationship with birds are also welcome. English names and classification follow, S.D. Ripley's *A Synopsis of the Birds of India and Pakistan* (1982, 2nd ed.) and scientific nomenclature, T. Inskipp, N. Lindsey & W. Duckworth's *An Annotated Checklist of the Birds of the Oriental Region* (1996). Unless specified, all observations are for 2000. Abbreviations, Contributors, Notes, Regional Referees, *etc*., are at the end. For selection of breeding criteria 'Probable, Possible, Confirmed', see *Pitta* # 82, February 1998, p. 4.

ANDHRA PRADESH

HYDERABAD DISTRICT

Alwal

28.xi: BLACK REDSTART 1; RED-BREASTED FLYCATCHER 1 (AP, SP).

Banjara Hills

27.xi: CUCKOO *C. canorus* 1 juv., in fresh plm (AP).

Jubilee Hills

29.ix INDIAN PITTA 1 dead bird found (SAK).

Kasu Brahmananda Reddy National Park
4.x: WHITE-BACKED MUNIA CB, ad., feeding yng (SU).
5.x: INDIAN MOORHEN CB, 1 ad., with 2 yng (SU).
2.xii: INDIAN PITTA hrd (AP).

MAHABUBNAGAR DISTRICT

Kodangal 23.xi (RM)
GLOSSY IBIS 57; BAR-HEADED GOOSE 450+ in paddy in groups varying from 6-80 birds; LESSER WHISTLING TEAL 315; PINTAIL 1800-2000; COMMON TEAL 201; SPOTBILLS 216; GADWALL 328; WIDGEON 439; GARGANEY 506; SHOVELLER 2500+; RED-CRESTED POCHARD 302; COMMON POCHARD 208; WHITE-EYED POCHARD 501; DEMOSELLE CRANE 1000+ in Toor (gram) fields; COOT 100+; SNIPE 3 sps. 350+ in a 5-acre paddy plot.
Palmakole Tank 19.xi (AP)
BLACK-TAILED GODWIT 2; RIVER TERN 1 ad., 4 imm; BLUE-TAILED BEE EATER; RED-VENTED BULBUL CB, 1 ad., feeding yng., without red vent; TREE PIPIT *A. hodgsonii* C.

MEDAK DISTRICT

ICRISAT Campus 26.xi (AP,KK,SU)
PURPLE MOORHEN CB, 1 yng without red frontal shield; PHEASANT-TAILED JACANA 1 non-br., plm; PIED CRESTED CUCKOO 1 imm; BLUETHROAT.

RANGAREDDI DISTRICT

Osman Sagar
18-19.xi: GREATER FLAMINGO 12 (MI).
21.xi: RUDDY SHELDUCK 3; PINTAIL 1000+; GARGANEY 50+; EASTERN GOLDEN PLOVER *Pluvialis fulva* 2 (AP,SAT, SU,SJ).
Shamirpet Lake 24.ix (MSKP,WSR)
PIED CRESTED CUCKOO 1 juv; GREY-NECKED BUNTING.

KERALA

MALAPPURAM DISTRICT (ZAP)

7.v: JUNGLE OWLET CB.
12.v: BROWN HAWK-OWL hrd.
16.v: BROWN-CROWNED PIGMY WOODPECKER.
17.v: COMMON MYNA PRB, carrying grass & paper into deserted owlet's N-hole.
19.v: COMMON GREY HORNBILL CB, N-wall opened on this day.
20.v: BRONZED DRONGO.
21.v: JUNGLE MYNA CB, carrying polythene piece to N. Hrd yng., begging.
11.ix: COMMON SANDPIPER 2.
8.x: COMMON HAWK-CUCKOO hawking flying termites; COLLARED SCOPS OWL 1 grey phase, other rufous; COMMON GREY HORNBILL hawking flying termites; GOLDEN-BACKED WOODPECKER 3 sunning & preening on coconut; BROWN SHRIKE.

ABBREVIATIONS: Ab-abundant; ad-adult/s; br-breeding; C-common/ly; CB-confirmed breeding; const-construction/ing; *c.*-approximately; disp-display/ing; F-female; flt-flight; fly-family; freq-frequent/ly; hrd-heard; id-identify/ied; imm-immature; inc-include/ing; Is-Island; juv-juvenile; LM-local migrant; M-male; mat-material; N-nest/ing/s; POB-possible breeding; PRB-probable breeding; plm-plumage; RF-Reserve Forest; Resp-respectively; Tlk-Taluk; vil-village; WL-wildlife; yng-young.
CONTRIBUTORS: AP (A. Pittie); MI (M. Inayatullah); MSKP (M.S.K. Prasad); RM (Rajeev Mathew); SAK (S. Ashok Kumar); SAT (Siraj A. Taher); SJ (Sachin Jaltare); SP (Smriti Pittie); SU (Shafaat Ulla); WSR (Walter S. Rao); ZAP (Zaibin AP).
REGIONAL REFEREES: Andhra Pradesh: Aasheesh Pittie; Goa: Heinz Lainer; Haryana: Harkirat S. Sangha; Karnataka: J.N. Prasad; Kerala: P.O. Nameer; Maharashtra: Nitin Jamdar; Punjab: H.S. Sangha; Rajasthan: H.S. Sangha; Tamil Nadu: V. Santharam.

LITERARY *WREN*DITIONS

"What can birds tell you, other than displaying those traits of aggression, or fear, or mutual attraction, which we may recognize when observing their behaviour? We have a little fear in ourselves, when looking on, that we may go too far in mixing up our own traits and terms with theirs; but each will manage to keep his territory, untransgressed by the other, and each takes part in the high order of nature. Watching the birds, I have seen ceremony, ritual, love-making, display, all worthy of admiration by the most glittering of human cultures. The speech of men and the speech of birds do not divide us altogether. In silence is unity.

"Perhaps the most eloquent thing about birds is that which we will probably never learn to decipher. In his study of puffins, R.M. Lockeley refers to their 'subtle, silent-gesture language.' That language is part of a still more silent order, the dark realm of existence where all their actions and necessities have their play. 'Approach with patience and with care." — **Hay, John** (1915): *The Great Beach*. W.W. Norton & Company, New York.

For Private Circulation Only

For information, write to: Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh, PO Box 45, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad 500034, India.
Editors: Aasheesh Pittie (3350683) & Siraj A Taher (6612608) **E-mail**: aasheesh@hd1.vsnl.net.in
Membership (Rs): Admission=20; Ordinary=100, Student=25 per annum; Life=1,000. *Add Rs.25/- for outstation cheques.*
Note: Dr Kumar Ghorpadé's Letter will resume from January 2001.

WISHING ALL OF YOU A MERRY CHRISTMAS AND A NEW YEAR FULL OF WONDERFUL BIRDING!